

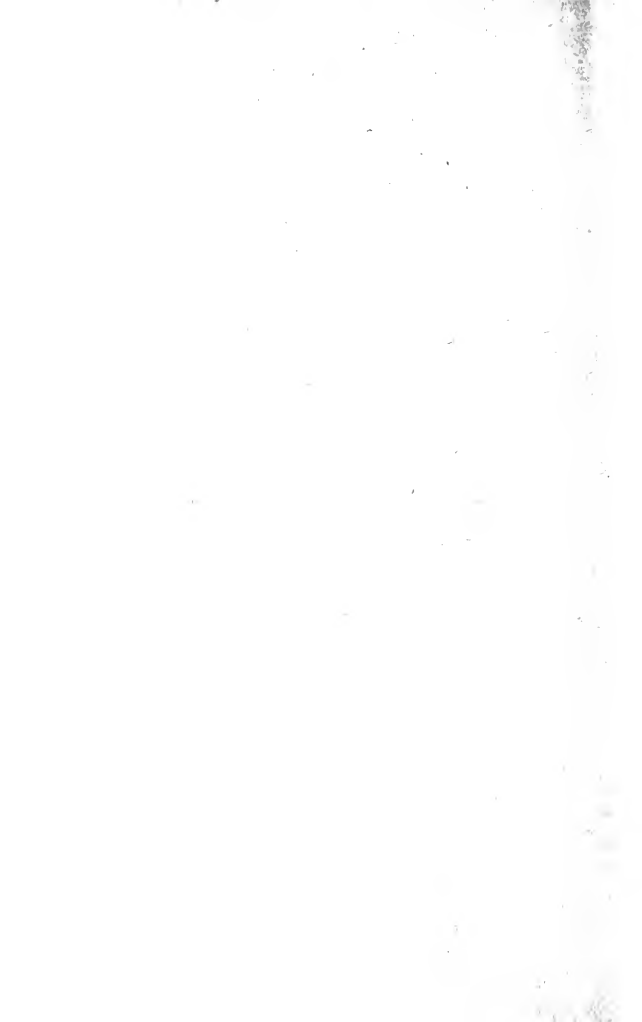
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VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

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XVII.

Injury and Insult.

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VIZETELLY'S ONE-VOLUME NOVELS.

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XVII.

# Injury and Insult.

BY FEDOR DOSTOIEFFSKY,

AUTHOR OF "CRIME AND PUNISHMENT."

TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY FREDERICK WHISHAW.

THIRD EDITION.



LONDON:

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## FEDOR MICHAILOVITCH DOSTOIEFFSKY.

FEDOR MICHAILOVITCH DOSTOIEFFSKY, the most powerful of the three great Russian novelists who rose, as it were, from the ashes of Gogol, the remaining members of this trinity of genius being Turgenieff and Tolstoi, was born at Moscow in 1821. His father, a retired army surgeon, held at this time an appointment on the medical staff of the Pauper Hospital, and it was in that abode of misery and sorrow that the eyes of the Russian Shakespeare, as he has sometimes been styled, first opened to the light. The effect of the surroundings amidst which his earliest years were spent is to be distinctly traced both in his life and works. From the outset he identified himself with the poor, the sorrowful, and the oppressed. It was their existence, shared in common by him, which he loved to describe, their cause which he sought to champion. His father, like nearly all men of his station at this epoch, owned a small landed estate, with a few serfs attached, situate in the Government of Toula, and here Fedor acquired a knowledge of country life and an appreciation of the beauties of nature, of which some traces are to be found in his writings. But his genius preferred to linger over the pale faces and drooping forms of the "Injured" and the "Insulted," to tell their wrongs, their miseries and their crimes; to express that deep sympathy for the humbler classes, that desperate pity for the lowly, the downtrodden, and the unfortunate which is his leading characteristic.

The elder Dostoieffsky succeeded in getting his two sons Fedor and Alexis admitted into the School of Military Engineering at St. Petersburg. A warm attachment existed between the brothers, fostered in a great measure by their common taste for literature, and destined to be a source of mutual comfort and support during the trials of their after-life. Fedor's letters to Alexis published in Dostoieffsky's Life and Correspondence some few years back at

St. Petersburg, form one of the most interesting features of that work. Both brothers found themselves out of their element in the School of Engineering. Vauban and Cohorn were less to their taste than Pouschkin, Gogol, Balzac, Eugène Sue and George Sand, the latter of whom seems to have exercised a powerful influence over Fedor's mind. But his favourite author was undoubtedly Gogol, and of all books Gogol's "Dead Souls" was the one that created the deepest and most lasting impression upon him. Leaving the School of Engineering in 1843 with the rank of sub-lieutenant, Fedor Dostoieffsky did not long pursue his military career. He sent in his resignation the following year, and thenceforward devoted himself exclusively to literature. From that day began his terrible duel with want and misery which was to last for close upon forty years. His father had died and the little Toula estate divided amongst his numerous children gave but a trifle to each. Dostoieffsky's correspondence during this period of his life, reads like one great and continual cry of anguish. Want and debt both weighed him down, and the only time that he was absolutely sure of his daily bread, was that spent in prison. It was not the material suffering that preyed upon him, however, but the moral degradation of poverty, terrible to one of his proud and sensitive nature, and expressed in the words and actions of some of the heroes of his stories in which the workings of his own mind are portrayed. His health, too, had already begun to suffer, his nerves were giving way and from his youth he had been subject to epileptic fits.

At the age of twenty-three he wrote his first story, "Poor Folk." He did not know a soul in the literary world and was at a loss what to do with his work. One of his friends, named Gregorievitch, submitted it to the poet Nekrassof. At three o'clock one morning Dostoieffsky was aroused by a violent knocking at his door. It was Nekrassof, who had been sitting up reading the manuscript and who could not even wait till a more orthodox hour for calling, in his eagerness to make the acquaintance of its author. The poet then hastened with the manuscript to the critic Bielinsky, the great oracle of Russian thought of that day. "A new Gogol is born to us!" was his exclamation as he entered the critic's study. "Gogols are springing up like mushrooms," was Bielinsky's surly reply. However he had no sooner read the work than his enthusiasm rivalled Nekrassof's, and a few months later, in 1846, "Poor Folk," appeared in the *St. Petersburg Sbornik*, of which the latter was editor, and all Russia ratified his judgment. It is only a simple

tale in the form of letters passing between a poor clerk and a young girl, but their lives and sorrows are so faithfully depicted as to draw from Bielinsky, on his first introduction to the author, the exclamation, "Young man do you really understand all the truth of what you have written?"

A literary career in Russia, and above all at that epoch, was not only precarious but dangerous. Dostoieffsky was now to go through the terrible trial that did so much to tinge his writings with their tragic force. In 1847 he had joined a band of youthful agitators, whose meetings developed into what was known as the Petrachevsky conspiracy. Some of his companions dreamed of the emancipation of the serfs and a liberal constitution, others were the forerunners of the Nihilists of to-day. Dostoieffsky identified himself with the more moderate of these two parties, he was not a man of action and was mainly moved by his innate sympathy for the poor and oppressed. The very charges subsequently levelled against him are of a very trivial character amounting to little more than his presence at certain meetings, alleged remarks against the press censorship, reading prohibited pamphlets, and promising aid in the starting of a contemplated printing-office. However, in April, 1849, he, with his brother Alexis and thirty-two others, was arrested on a charge of conspiracy, and confined for eight months in a cell in the casemates of the citadel. Some of the accused, including Alexis, were released; but on the 22nd December, Dostoieffsky and twenty other convicted conspirators were led out to the Semenovskiy Square to hear the sentence that had been passed in their absence by a military tribunal read out to them, and apparently to have it executed, for the first object that met their eyes was a huge scaffold erected in the middle of the square.

A van laden with coffins was drawn up close at hand. As the prisoners assembled on the platform Dostoieffsky communicated to one of his companions in misfortune, named Monbelli, the plot of a novel which he had thought out in prison. It was freezing hard, but the prisoners were forced to strip to their shirts whilst their sentence was slowly read out to them, half an hour being consumed in the process. "Surely we are not going to be executed?" said Dostoieffsky to his neighbour Mourouf, for the notion that it would be so, had not struck him till that moment. Mourouf merely pointed towards the coffins. The sentence closed with the words "are condemned to death and sentenced to be shot." A priest was

present, and exhorted the wretched men to confess, but only one complied with this invitation, the rest merely kissing the cross. They were to be shot in batches. Petrachefsky and two of the chief ringleaders were first lashed to the fatal posts, a firing party took up its position in front of them and the officer in command gave the words "Ready, present." The muskets were levelled and the word "Fire," was about to be given, when, suddenly, an aide-de-camp waved a white flag and it was announced to the prisoners that the Czar, in his clemency, had commuted the sentence of death to various terms of penal servitude. Vehicles were in readiness at the foot of the scaffold to convey them to Siberia. The criminals tied to the posts were unbound, when it was found that one of them, Gregorievitch, had lost his reason, which he never recovered. Dostoieffsky gives a vivid portrayal of his thoughts whilst thus waiting for death in his novel, "The Idiot."

The sentence on Dostoieffsky was four years' penal servitude, to be followed by enforced service for an indefinite period as a private soldier and deprivation of his rank as a noble, and of all his civil rights. For four years this nervous, sensitive, mystically-inclined thinker had to work amongst the lowest scum of the criminal classes, under military supervision. He has himself ably described his sufferings, the crushing fatigue of the labour one feels to be useless, the mental torture of never being alone even for a single instant for years. Yet his greatest anguish was the impossibility of writing, of alleviating his misery by putting his thoughts into words. His only solace lay in a copy of the New Testament which he read at night, whilst his companions slept off the fatigues of the day. His "Recollections of the Deadhouse," translated into English under the title of "Buried Alive," is a personal record of his life in Siberia, though presented as the experience of one Alexander Gorianchikoff. The device was necessary in order to evade the censorship at a time when the Russian Government would not even admit that there were such things as political criminals, and when even judges, in passing sentence, veiled the name of Siberia under the euphemism of "a distant locality." His term of penal servitude worked out, Dostoieffsky was forced to enlist in one of the Siberian regiments but shortly gained promotion. In 1856 on the accession of the Emperor Alexander II., his civil rights were restored, and he was allowed to retire from the army. It was not, however, till three years later that he received permission to return to Russia. He found his native country quivering, it

may be said, with expectancy and hope. It was the eve of the emancipation of the serfs.

Dostoieffsky had brought back a wife, the widow of one of his fellow-conspirators. The story of his marriage is full of the ill-luck which dogged the novelist's footsteps, as well as of the noble self-denial which distinguished his whole life. The lady had been attached to another, and Dostoieffsky, despite his love for her, laboured to remove the obstacles to her union with the man she seemed to prefer. We find a reflection of this epoch of his life in the present volume, "Injury and Insult," in which the hero, a young novelist, labours untiringly for the happiness of the girl he loves, although the success of his endeavours means the absolute loss of hope to himself. Let those, therefore, who may consider the character of Vánia overdrawn in its marvellous unselfishness, reflect that they are reading the record of Dostoieffsky's own conduct under circumstances very similar to those in this novel. The character of Natásha, the incarnation of passion, has been aptly likened to one of the victims of a Greek tragedy, whilst there is something about Neily which recalls the creations of Dickens.

From the date of his return to Russia, till 1865, Dostoieffsky devoted the whole of his time and genius to journalism. He started two papers for the propagation of his peculiar ideas, which seemed to hold a middle place between Liberalism and Slavophilism. His motto was a mystic verse of Tutchef to the effect that Russia cannot be understood by any mere reasoning process and must be believed in with blind faith. Both papers failed, and in 1865, he lost his wife and his brother. To escape his creditors he crossed the frontier and for some years led a miserable life in Germany and Italy, a victim to epilepsy—a disease on the torments of which he enlarges eloquently in several of his works—returning once or twice in secret to his native country in order to obtain money from his publishers. Life abroad does not appear to have greatly impressed him, the only vivid recollection he seems to have retained being that of an execution by the guillotine at Lyons, which he has introduced as an incident in more than one of his books. During this exile between 1865, and 1871, he wrote three of his greatest works, "Crime and Punishment," "The Idiot," and "Demons." The first of these has been termed the profoundest study of criminal psychology written since "Macbeth" was penned. None but a Russian and a genius could have drawn such a character as Rodion Raskolnikoff, who has

been described as "the Hamlet of the Madhouse." The appearance of this book at once guaranteed the lasting fame of its author, and the sensation it produced in Russia was overwhelming. Strangely enough, a Moscow student murdered a pawnbroker immediately after its publication under circumstances in every way identical to those set forth in "Crime and Punishment." The interest and enthusiasm with which this book was everywhere received were intensified by this circumstance.

"The Idiot," the hero of the work bearing that title, is, however, the character whose creation was at once Dostoieffsky's greatest feat as it was his chief delight. The type is a victim to epilepsy like Dostoieffsky himself, and the author enlarges with many mystical disquisitions upon the thoughts and feelings of the sufferer before each climax in the story. Rogojine, too, is a terrible type, the man whose love is fascination, whose fascination is hate, and whose hate means murder.

"Demons" is a picture of Nihilistic life, written during the period of rivalry and hatred existing between the two great masters who, at that time, disputed between them the chief laurels of Russian literature, Turgenieff and Dostoieffsky, for as yet the star of Tolstoi had not risen. The plot, a Nihilistic conspiracy in a provincial town, is much the same as that of Turgenieff's "Virgin Soil," but the diabolically realistic power of some of Dostoieffsky's scenes, such as the murder of Shatof, has never been approached by his rival who, however, can claim to have been first in the field in presenting a Nihilist hero, the cynical Bazarof of "Fathers and Sons." Dostoieffsky could never forgive Turgenieff the creation of this prototype, and sought to avenge himself by presenting his great competitor for literary fame in the character of a ridiculous author in his novel of "Demons."

After the publication of "Demons," which by many Russians is held to be the most interesting of his works, Dostoieffsky returned to Russia, and for the remaining ten years of his life led a more peaceful and quiet existence, than heretofore. He married again, and his second wife, an intelligent and courageous woman, proved of the greatest value to him both as an intellectual companion and a clever helpmate. Thanks to her, he managed to free himself from the load of debt that had weighed upon him so long. During this time he wrote his longest novel, "The Brothers Karamazof," a work containing many distinctive traces of the master hand; also "The Gamblers," "Stepanchikoff," "Uncle's Dream,"



“The Permanent Husband,” “Letters from Underground,” “The Double Man,” “Netochka,” “The Lady of the House,” “Another Man’s Wife,” “The Offshoot,” and other stories, all distinguished by his individual genius. During the last few years of his life, too, he issued a publication entitled “The Note-book of a Writer,” which appeared at intervals more or less regular, and was destined to embody and propagate his peculiar ideas and theories—political, social, and literary. It has been likened rather to a record of the intermittent oracles issued by the Pythoness at Delphi, than to anything of the nature of a newspaper or review.

Viscount Eugène Melchior de Vogüé, a personal acquaintance of Dostoieffsky writing in the *Revue des deux Mondes*, describes him as small, slight, nervous, worn and bowed by sixty evil years, and yet possessing a certain kittenish vivacity. His hair and beard were still yellow and worn long. His face was that of a Russian peasant, a real Moscow moujik, a flattened nose, small eyes twinkling with a fire, now sombre, now mild, from under heavy brows, a broad forehead, studded with knobs and protuberances, drawn features and a melancholy mouth. No human face ever wore such an expression of concentrated suffering, every torture of mind and body seemed to have been stamped upon it, and in it could be read better than in his books the long habits of fear, distrust, and martyrdom. When excited or passionately declaiming against vice or oppression, his features wore such an expression of fury as to recall those of some desperate criminal; a moment later he was the sad old saint of a Slavonic ikon.

Dostoieffsky is a singer whose audience is the heart of humanity. The mass of his fellow-countrymen adored him and the ascendancy he exercised over the poorer classes was prodigious. His share in the direction of contemporary movement in Russia cannot be overrated. At the inauguration of the Pouschkin monument in 1880, at which the whole of the foremost representatives of Russian literature were present, his popularity eclipsed that of all his rivals. The audience burst into sobs when he spoke, and afterwards carried him home in triumph. But on the 10th, of February, 1881, the giant mind was at rest for ever, the pitiful heart which for over forty years had bled for the poor, the injured, and the insulted, had ceased to beat after a few days’ illness. Whilst lying in humble state in his coffin, thousands of his poor admirers thronged to gaze their last at their old champion and friend, whilst his funeral was the signal for a great demonstration of the dis-

satisfied. Twenty to thirty thousand persons with banners and wreaths followed the coffin, and a hundred thousand more lined the route along which the procession passed to the Monastery of St. Alexander Nevsky.

There are many Russian writers of mark and ability, some known and some unknown in this country, but none who can compare with Dostoieffsky in that dreadful power of the creation of character no less terrible than true. Someone has said of his creations that if you scratch them they bleed. It is to be hoped that the series of translations of the works of Fedor Dostoieffsky, which the publishers of the present volume have undertaken, will have the effect of making the writings of this Russian Titan better known amongst English readers.

# INJURY AND INSULT.

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## PART I.

### CHAPTER I.

LAST year, on the evening of the 22nd March, I met with a very singular adventure. I had been running about town all day looking for lodgings; mine were damp, and I caught a bad cold in them, and, though I had wanted to change them since last autumn, somehow or other I had put off the change until now—the spring. I had looked about, as I said, all day, but found nothing suitable: I wanted my lodging to be isolated, above all things—in case of need one room would do, but it must be spacious,—and, at the same time, I did not want to pay a high rent.

I have always observed that in a confined lodging one's ideas do not run freely. I like to walk up and down the room as I meditate upon my novels; and, while I am on the subject of my novels, I may add that I have always found far more charm in dreaming them out than in writing them down. Why is this? for I am by no means lazy by nature.

I had felt unwell ever since early morning, and now, towards evening, I was worse; I felt feverish, and, as I had been on my feet all day, I was harassed with fatigue when I arrived in Voznesénsky Street, a few minutes before sunset.

I love the March sun in St. Petersburg, especially at its setting on a calm, fine evening. When the weather is frosty, the whole street, inundated with floods of light, bursts into glory in an instant. The houses seem suddenly to give out

rays of sunshine, and their colours—grey, yellow, dirty green—lose their sinister aspect in the wink of an eye. Then a man's soul lights up too, and a cold chill runs through his veins, and you wake up with a start, as though someone had touched your funny-bone. New ideas come with the new light; oh! wonderful power of a ray of sunshine over the human soul!

Meanwhile the sun had set, the frost was growing keener and began to tickle one's nose, the darkness grew deeper, and the gas-light streamed from the shop windows. When I was opposite Müller the confectioner's shop, I suddenly remained fixed to the spot, and stared at the opposite side of the road, with a presentiment that something extraordinary was about to happen, and, at the same instant, I observed, on the pavement opposite to me, an old man and a dog. My heart seemed to wince under the blow of a disagreeable impression, but I could not tell whence it arose. I am no "mystic," I believe very little in presentiments and divinations; at the same time there have occurred in my experience, just the same as in that of others, certain circumstances difficult of explanation. This old man, for instance,—why did I feel, at the sight of him, that something would this day happen to me, different from my usual daily experiences? However, I was ill, and one's impressions during sickness are nearly always illusory.

The old man proceeded towards the confectioner's shop referred to; he advanced with slow and uncertain step; he moved his limbs without bending them, as though they were blocks of wood; he stooped and tapped the stones of the pavement as he went along. In all my life I never saw so strange-looking a figure; every time I had met him at Müller's shop he had left a disagreeable, sad impression upon me. His tall figure; his crooked back; his livid face—eighty years old—that looked like the face of a corpse; his old coat, torn at the seams; his round hat, bruised and broken, which might well have seen twenty years of service, covering his bald head, which retained just one tuft of hair at the nape of the neck—hair which had been white, but had now turned yellow; his automatic movements; all these things struck persons, meeting him for the first time, in spite of themselves.

It was strange enough to see this old man dragging on a solitary life, without a soul to look after him, as it seemed, and looking more like a madman escaped from his keepers than anything else. His leanness was quite indescribable—he had,

one might almost say, no body left ; he was skin and bone, and nothing more. His eyes, large but dim, and surrounded by a sort of bluish circle, stared constantly straight in front of him—undeviating, they never looked aside, and never saw anything. I am pretty sure of that, for I had more than once noticed that he would stare straight at you and walk straight into you, just as though he had nothing but space before him.

He had lately begun to frequent Müller's—he and his dog ; but not one of the usual customers at the confectioner's had ever made up his mind to address the old man, and he, for his part, had never said a word to anyone. "Why does he come to Müller's? What does he come to do?" So I thought to myself as I watched him from the other side, without being able to remove my eyes from him ; and I was conscious of a sort of spiteful feeling against him developing in my heart, the consequence of illness and fatigue. "What does he think about?" I said to myself. "What ideas can he have inside his head? Does he still think at all?" All expression seemed to have died out for ever from this old face. Where did he get this villanous old dog from, that appeared to be an integral and inseparable part of its master, whom it so strongly resembled? This wretched dog seemed to be eighty years old, like its master. It had the appearance of a dog which must certainly be far older than any other quadruped of its species ever was ; and further, I don't know why, the very first time that I saw it, I conceived the idea that this dog couldn't be like any other dog—that it was a beast of an extraordinary nature ; that it had within it some germ of sorcery ; that it was a sort of Mephistopheles in canine form ; and that its destiny was in some way or other linked with that of its master by a mysterious tie. It was as thin as a skeleton, or, to put it better, as thin as its master ; if you had seen the beast you would have said, as I did, that it had not touched food for years. It was quite bald ; its tail, stuck on to its body like a piece of wood, was pressed tight between its emaciated legs ; and its long ears hung sadly back over its head, which also hung down. In all my life I never saw such another wretched-looking beast as this.

When the pair of them walked along the streets—the master in front, followed by his dog, with its muzzle glued to the skirts of his coat—their gait and appearance seemed to say at every step, "Oh, but we're old, we're old! oh, God, but we're old!"

One day the idea struck me that the old man and his dog had become detached from a page of Hoffmann, illustrated by Gavarni, and that they walked the world as a sort of walking advertisement for the editor.

Well, I crossed the road and went into the confectioner's. The old man's behaviour inside the shop was strange to a degree; and Müller, from behind his counter, used to make a face of disgust whenever this unwelcome visitor arrived. This singular customer of his never ate anything, but used to go straight to the corner where the stove was; and, if this place happened to be occupied, he would stand and stare vacantly, with a stupid perplexed look, before the occupant for a few moments, and then move off with a disappointed air to the other side of the room, near the window; there he would take a chair, seat himself slowly, take off his hat, and put it near him on the floor; he would then place his stick alongside of his hat, lean full length against the back of his chair, and so remain—immovable for three or four hours at a time. No one had ever seen him with a newspaper in his hand, or heard him say a word or even utter a sound.

He used to sit there, staring fixedly before him with his dull lustreless eyes, so that you would wager anything that he neither saw nor heard aught of what was going on around him. His dog, after turning round two or three times in its place, used to lie down at his feet, gloomy and dejected, pushing his nose well in between his master's boots, giving a profound sigh, and then, stretched at full length on the floor, he would lie immovable, and as though he had ceased to live, the whole evening. Anyone might well imagine that these two creatures, long since dead, were in the habit of resuscitating themselves at sunset, solely in order to come to Müller's shop to fulfil some mysterious obligation unknown to man.

When he had sat thus for some hours the old man would get up, take his hat and stick, and start off homewards; the old dog got up, too, and, with head bent down and tail between his legs, followed his aged master like some old machine.

The frequenters of the confectioner's shop—nearly all Germans—did all they could to avoid the old fellow, and tried to sit anywhere but near him, in order to show him their dislike for his person; but he never took the slightest notice of them.

I used to go to Müller's the first few days of each month to read the Russian reviews. When I went into the room on

this particular evening, I found the old man already installed near the window, and his dog, as usual, stretched at his feet.

I sat down in silence in a corner and asked myself, mentally, this question, "Why have I come here, where I have got absolutely nothing to do,—and, especially just now, when I am feeling ill, and had much better go straight home, have a cup of tea, and get to bed? Have I come here with no object but to look at this old man?" The feeling of dislike seemed to have taken possession of me. "What have I got to do with the old wretch," I thought, as I remembered the feeling of uneasiness which he had caused me in the street, "or he with me?" Whence came this weird humour that was upon me, and which arose within me and disquieted me with every little unimportant event that transpired, and prevented me from observing clearly what went on around me?—a humour which the critic, who had reviewed my last novel, and who was himself a thinker too, had observed and pointed out.

Whilst I made these reflections, and vexed myself over them, I continued sitting where I was, and the heaviness of illness fell heavier and heavier on me each moment, until at last I felt that I could not leave the warm room I was in without risk at present; so I took up a French newspaper, read a few lines, and dozed off.

The Germans, talking and smoking and reading around, did not disturb me; but after half an hour I was awakened by a fit of shivering. I must certainly get home! But a silent scene which was going on in the room at the moment kept me seated.

I have already said that the old man, as soon as he had settled himself in his chair, would fix his eyes upon some point or other, and keep them thus fixed for the rest of the evening. It had been my lot, before now, to have this stupidly-obstinate gaze, which discerned nothing, focussed upon me. It was a most disagreeable, even intolerable sensation, and, as a rule, I would change my place as quickly as possible.

For the last quarter of an hour the victim of this gaze was a small, neat and plump German, whose red face was encircled by a collar starched to a degree; he was a merchant from Riga, staying at St. Petersburg; his name, as I heard afterwards, Adam Ivanitch Schultz; and he was an intimate friend of Müller's, and did not as yet know anything about the old man. He was reading "The Village Barber," when, suddenly

raising his head to take a sip of his punch, he observed the man's gaze riveted upon him.

Adam Ivanitch was a particularly susceptible man, as are all Germans of the better class; he thought it strange and offensive conduct on the part of anyone to stare at him so fixedly and unceremoniously. With suppressed indignation he turned away his eyes from this ill-mannered guest, muttered something between his teeth, and hid behind his paper.

Soon he peered out again—the same pertinacity in the old fellow's eyes, and the same utter absence of intelligence in his stare. Adam Ivanitch still kept quiet. But the third time his patience gave way, and he felt that he must stand up for his dignity, and not permit the fair city of Riga, of which he no doubt felt himself the representative, to be compromised in the presence of a distinguished company like the present. He threw his paper on to the table, banging the latter at the same time with some force, after which, carried away by his sense of personal dignity, red in the face with punch and *amour-propre*, he, in his turn, fixed his little inflamed eyes upon the cause of his displeasure. It looked like a trial as to which would overcome the other by the magnetic influence of his gaze, and as though they were waiting to see who would cave in first, and haul down his colours.

This noise of Adam Ivanitch's blow upon the table, and the eccentric position he had now placed himself in, had centred the attention of all present upon the pair. Everyone had suspended his occupation for the moment, in order to watch the two champions, and looked on with grave and silent curiosity. The scene was becoming very comical; but the magnetic attack of Adam Ivanitch's eyes spent itself in pure waste; Adam Ivanitch became absolutely crimson, while the old man continued to stare at the furious Mr. Schultz, and was no more conscious that he had become the object of general curiosity than if he had been up in the moon.

At length Adam Ivanitch's patience became fairly exhausted, and he burst forth.

"Why do you continue to stare at me so?" he called out, in German, with a shrill, piercing voice and a threatening air; but his adversary no more emerged out of his silence than if he had neither understood nor heard the question. So Adam Ivanitch decided to speak Russian to him.

"I ask you why you go on staring at me in that obstinate



way?" he yelled with redoubled rage, and in very bad Russian, jumping up from his chair.

The old man never moved. The audience raised a murmur of disapprobation. Müller himself, attracted by the noise, entered the room. Being informed of the circumstances, he judged that the old man was deaf, and put his lips close to his ear.

"Mr. Schultz has just asked you not to stare at him so obstinately," he said as loudly as ever he could. The incomprehensible visitor mechanically turned his gaze upon Müller, and his countenance, immovable until this moment, suddenly assumed an expression of trouble and anxiety. Violently agitated, he stooped and felt for his hat, seized it quickly, with his stick, got up, and with a piteous smile—the smile of humiliation which the poor man puts on who has occupied some seat to which he is not entitled and gets turned out—prepared to go.

There was something so piteous about the humble and obsequious precipitation of the infirm old man—something which touched the heart so deeply, that all present, beginning with Adam Ivanitch, immediately softened towards him. It was clear, that not only was the old man quite incapable of insulting anyone himself, but that he quite understood that he could be turned out from any place he happened to be in, at any moment, like any beggar. Müller was a good sort of man, and compassionate.

"No, no," he said, patting him familiarly on the shoulder, to encourage him. "No, no; sit down again. Mr. Schultz (who is an eminent gentleman, and known at Court) only begs you not to stare at him so; that's all."

But the poor old man understood no more this time than the last; his agitation only increased; he stooped to pick up his handkerchief—an old blue tattered handkerchief which had just fallen out of his hat, and called his dog, which—stretched at full length on the floor, with its two forefeet pressed against its muzzle—never moved, and seemed to be fast asleep.

"Azor, Azor," said the old man, with his trembling broken voice, "Azorka!" Azorka never budged.

"Azorka," repeated the old man anxiously, and he touched the dog with the end of his cane; but the dog did not alter its position. The cane dropped from his grasp. He bent down, he fell on his knees, and with both hands he raised Azor's nose.

Pocr Azorka! he was dead—without a sign, dead at his master's feet—of old age, perhaps, and perhaps of starvation.

The old man looked at him for a moment in consternation, as though he did not realize that the dog was dead, then he stooped quietly over his old servant—his old friend—and pressed his pale face against that dead muzzle. There was a moment of silence. We were all affected; at last the poor old man got up, his pallor was extraordinary, and he shivered as though under the influence of a terrible fever.

"One can stuff it, you know," said Müller, in compassionate tones, anxious to console the poor old fellow, "it can be stuffed very easily. Here's Fedor Karlovitch Kruger; he's a great hand at stuffing animals. Fedor Karlovitch Kruger is really a master at stuffing," he repeated, picking up the old man's hat from the floor and returning it to its owner.

"Yes, I know how to stuff animals very well," said Mr. Kruger modestly, coming to the front; he was a very tall, thin German, with reddish dishevelled hair and a hooked nose, surmounted by a pair of spectacles.

"Oh yes," added Müller, who began to be rather enthusiastic over his idea, "Fedor Karlovitch Kruger has a wonderful talent for stuffing all sorts of animals."

"Yes, I must say I have some talent for stuffing all sorts of animals," repeated Kruger, "and I am very anxious to stuff your dog there, gratis—for nothing, you know," he added in a fit of liberality.

"No, no," cried Mr. Schultz, "I will pay for stuffing the dog."

Mr. Schultz's face was now redder than ever, and, probably considering himself the innocent cause of all this trouble, he, too, broke out into flames of generosity. The old man heard all this without understanding a word, evidently, and his shivering attack went on.

"Look here, you must drink up this glass of good cognac," said Müller at last, seeing that his mysterious visitor was intent upon getting away at all costs.

They gave him the glass, which the old fellow took mechanically, but his hand trembled, and, before he had time to lift the brandy to his lips, he had spilled more than a half of it, and he put the glass down again on the plate without having touched a drop. Then, with a strange laugh, which had nothing in its sound at all consistent with the circumstances, he unsteadily,

but precipitately, made his way out, leaving Azorka stretched in its place.

All present remained half-stupefied, and soon exclamations began to be heard on all sides.

"Well, did you ever see the like of that! That's a nice sort of thing to happen!" remarked these Germans, staring blankly at each other.

As for me, I darted out in pursuit of the old man. A few paces from the shop there was a little street, narrow and dark, bordered by high houses, and I had a feeling that he must have taken that turning. The second building on the right side of this street was a house in process of construction, surrounded by scaffolding. This scaffolding reached nearly into the middle of the road, and I perceived the old man hidden by the shadow in the corner made by the scaffolding and the wall of the next house; he was sitting on the pavement, his elbows resting on his knees, and he held his head between his two hands. I sat down by his side.

"Come, come," I said, not knowing in the least how to begin, "come, come; don't be so miserable about poor Azorka. Let me take you home. Here, I'll hire a droshky, and we'll drive home. Where do you live?"

He made no answer. I didn't know what to do; the street was empty. Suddenly he seized my hand.

"I'm suffocating; I'm choking!" he said. His voice was feeble and hoarse.

"Well, I'll take you home. Come," I said, raising him by force; "you must have a cup of tea and get to bed. I'll call a trap. I'll get you a doctor—one of my friends."

I don't remember what else I said to him; he tried to get up, but when he was half on his feet he fell down again, and began to mutter once more with that dreadful choking voice of his. I bent over him again, and listened.

"Vassili Ostrof"—the words rattled in the old man's throat—"Sixth Line, Six—th Li—ne." He said no more, and was mute again.

"You live in Vassili Island, do you?" I said; "but you were not going in that direction. Look here, you must go this way! Come along, I'll take you there!"

He did not budge. I took his hand—it fell back lifeless. I looked at his face—I touched it. He was dead! I thought I must be dreaming.

Well, this adventure caused me a good deal of worry and trouble, but my feverish attack passed off of itself, thanks to it all.

We found out the old man's lodging. He did not live at the Vassli Ostrof, but a step or two from the spot where he had breathed his last—in Klugen's house, fifth story, just below the roof. He had a little antechamber and a large room, very low, and provided with three little skylights to serve for windows. The old fellow had existed there in great misery. For furniture he had nothing but a table, two chairs, and an old bed, as hard as a stone, and with fibres of some coarse stuffing sticking out all over it; and it turned out afterwards that even this miserable furniture did not belong to him, but to the landlord. One could see that the stove had not been heated for an age, and there was no candle to be found. Probably, his one idea of going to Müller's was to get into the light and warmth, and sit there.

On the table there was an earthenware jug with nothing in it, and an old crust of bread, as dry as a board. There was not a farthing of money to be found; he had not even a change of linen to be buried in; someone came forward and provided a shirt.

It was clear that he could not have lived like this absolutely alone—somebody must have come to look after him, however rarely. His passport was in the drawer of the table. The dead man had been a foreigner, but a naturalised Russian subject; his name was Jeremiah Smith, his calling a mechanic, and his age 78. On the table were two books—an abridged geography and a New Testament in Russian, the margin covered with pencil and nail marks; I bought these two books. We made inquiries of the other inhabitants of the house, and of the landlord; they hardly knew anything about him. There were a host of small lodgers in the house, mostly mechanics and German women, who occupied furnished rooms, with board and service. The landlord knew nothing of his late lodger, excepting that he used to pay six roubles per month for his room, and that he had not settled for the last month, so that they had been obliged to give him notice to quit.

We made enquiries as to whether anyone ever came to see the old man, but nobody could give a satisfactory answer to this question. The house was a large one, and so many people came in and out of the arched gateway that it was difficult to remem-

her much about it. The porter, who had served at the gate for some five years, could, no doubt, have given some information; but he had gone to his village a fortnight before, and had left his nephew in charge—a young fellow who did not as yet know half the inhabitants of the house.

I am not very sure what was the upshot of all these inquiries, but the old man was buried at last.

In spite of all sorts of other business which I had on hand, I went over to Vassili Ostrof every day, to the Sixth Line; I almost laughed at myself for doing it. What could I see in the Sixth Line but a row of houses; but, thought I, why did the old man talk about the Sixth Line at the very moment of his death? Could he have been simply raving?

As soon as his lodging was free I took it; I liked it. What pleased me about it, was the size of the room; at the same time, however, it was so low that at first I was continually under the impression that I should knock my head against the ceiling; but I soon got accustomed to it. At all events one couldn't expect anything better for six roubles a month, and I liked the absolute independence of the lodging. There was nothing to be arranged now excepting to get somebody to serve me, and, meanwhile, the porter undertook to come at least once a day to tidy up, and promised to act as waiter on occasions.

I hoped, too, that somebody would come and inquire after the old man; but he had been dead five days now, and as yet nobody had turned up.

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## CHAPTER II.

**A**T this time, that is about a year ago, I was on the staff of several journals, contributing short articles to them, but I felt sure that I could develop into an author of more important works, and at the moment I was busy over a great novel. As for all my fine projects, the ultimate result has been that here I am, stretched on a bed of sickness in a hospital, and, so far as I can make out, on the straight road to death.

And if the end is near, what is the use of writing down these recollections?

This last and painful year of my life, in spite of myself, and without a moment's respite, will come and range itself in my memory; I shall write the whole thing down, because I believe that unless I do so I shall simply die of *ennui*. All these impressions of the past throw my soul into a state of agitation which amounts to downright misery—torment almost. Under my pen they will perhaps calm down and range themselves into order; they will appear less like a dreadful dream, or nightmare. The mechanical action of writing has its value—it tranquillises and cools me; it awakes within me my old habits as an author and transforms my nightmare and sick-man's visions into palpable shape—into real work. Yes, here's a good idea! Now, if I die, the sick-nurse shall inherit my memoirs; he can paste his double window up, when winter comes, with the paper.

I began my story in the middle, I don't know why. Anyhow I must write it all down; so let's begin again at the beginning. My autobiography at all events shall not be a long one.

I was born, not in St. Petersburg, but a long way from this city, in the Government of ——. My parents were good enough folk, I suppose; anyhow they left me an orphan while I was still small, and I grew up in the house of Nicholas Sergéevitch Ikménief, a small landowner, who took me in out of pity. He had but one daughter, Natásha, three years younger than myself, and she and I grew up together like brother and sister.

Oh, beautiful days of my childhood! What folly that all I have to look back to, and regret, at twenty-five years of age, is you! that, at the hour of death, you are all I can look back to with joy and love. The sun used to shine so bright, it was so different from this St. Petersburg sun; and our little hearts used to beat so joyously. Then we were surrounded by green fields and woods—not, as now, by piles of inanimate stones. What marvels were the park and garden at Vassiliefsky, the property of which Nicholas Sergéevitch was steward! Ah me! Natásha and I used to walk about together in that garden, and in the damp forest which stretched beyond it, and in which we one day lost ourselves.

Happy days! here life first began to appear as it is, full of mystery and attraction; and it was so sweet to learn it

together. I used to think that some mysterious being, unfathomable and unknown, existed hidden behind each tree, within every shrub; the world of fairy-tales and the world of reality were merged into one, for us; and often, when the mists of evening were denser than usual over the dark valleys, Natásha and I would stand together, hand in hand, overlooking the whirlpool in the river, and would look in each other's face in the darkness, and wait, with a fearful curiosity, to see something stalking out of the mist, or to hear some voice speaking to us out of the depths of the precipice, and to find that our nurse's tales were about to prove to be pure truth.

Once, years afterwards, I reminded Natásha of the day when they first gave us a book to read, called "First Readings for Children," and how we had immediately run off into the garden, near the little pond, where there was a grassy bank beneath an old tufted maple, and how we settled down there and read a fairy story, called "Alphonso and Delinda." To this moment I cannot think of that tale without strange emotion, and only last year, when I repeated the first lines of it to Natásha—"Alphonso, the hero of my tale, was born in Portugal; Don Kamir, his father," etc.—the tears came to my eyes. I dare say I looked a dreadful fool, for Natásha could not help smiling, which contrasted funnily with my enthusiasm. She had seen this, however, and to make amends she began to talk over the past with me; and while she spoke she, too, had become moved.

Oh, the delightful evening we spent together, rummaging among those old recollections of the past! And the day when I left to stay at the capital of the Government, *how* she had cried. And then, at our last separation, when I left Vassiliefsky finally, to continue my studies at the St. Petersburg University! I was seventeen years old; she was going on for fifteen. She has since told me that I was at that time a long lanky boy, so badly put together that no one could look at me without laughing. Well, when the moment came for parting, I remember I took her aside to tell her something of terrific importance, but my tongue refused to utter a sound—it was paralysed, and we had no conversation at all. I did not know what to say, and I dare say she would not have understood what I meant; anyhow, I wept hot tears over her, and went away without having said a word. We did not see each other

for long after this—two years after, and then it was at St. Petersburg, whither her father had removed with his family, on account of a lawsuit, just when I began my literary career.

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### CHAPTER III.

NICHOLAS SERGEEVITCH IKMENIEF belonged to a good, but long since almost ruined, family. At the death of his parents he had inherited a very fair property, and a hundred and fifty serfs. At twenty years old he had joined the hussars, and had served six years, when, one fine evening, he lost all his property at a game of cards. He did not sleep a wink that night, but next day he reappeared at the card-table, and staked his horse, which was all he had left, on a single card: that card happened to win, so did another, and a third, and in half an hour he had rewon fifty serfs and the little estate of Ikméniefsky.

He now threw up card-playing, applied for his retirement from the army, got it two months later, with the rank of lieutenant, and returned to vegetate on his property. He never mentioned the circumstances just described, and undoubtedly, in spite of his well-known sweet temper, he would have quarrelled with anyone who dared remind him of them.

He studied rural economy assiduously after this, and a few years later he married a young lady belonging to the *petite noblesse*, Anna Andréevna Shoumiloff, who was poor, and didn't bring him a farthing, but who had been educated at a distinguished establishment at the capital, Madame Revêche's, a French refugee, and was very proud of this fact all her life, though no one could ever make out wherein this magnificent education consisted.

Nicholas Sergéevitch developed into a first-rate scientific farmer, and his neighbours took him for their model.

He lived in this quiet fashion for some years, until one fine day Prince Peter Alexandrovitch Valkofski, a neighbouring landowner, whose estate, Vassiliefsky, numbered nine hundred serfs, arrived from St. Petersburg



His arrival made a great sensation in the country. Although not quite in the first bloom of youth, the prince was still in the prime of life; his position was good; he had relations of influence; he was handsome, rich, and a widower—this last fact rendering him particularly interesting in the eyes of all the mammas and of all the marriageable women in the Government. People spoke of the brilliant reception which had been accorded to him by the governor, who was discovered to be a distant relation of the prince. It was said that his amiable manners had quite turned the heads of all the women about, and so on. In short, he was one of those brilliant representatives of the highest St. Petersburg society, so rarely seen in the provinces, and who produce such an extraordinary effect there when they do turn up.

However, it appeared that the prince was not quite as sweet as honey to all, and especially to those whom he had no need to treat so well—his inferiors; nor did he think it necessary to make the acquaintance of the landowners in the neighbourhood of his own estate, which fact made him many enemies. What then must have been the general astonishment when he determined to pay a visit to Nicholas Sergéevitch! It was true, however, that the latter certainly was his nearest neighbour.

The advent of the prince was an event in the Ikménief's establishment. From the very first day the married couple were quite charmed with him, especially Anna Andréevna, whose enthusiasm knew no bounds. After a very short while the prince was perfectly at home with them, used to come and see them any or every day, invited them to his house, cracked jokes with them, and sang and played on their miserable piano. The Ikméniefs could never see enough of him; how could anyone have said of so amiable, so agreeable a man that he was proud and egotistical, as the neighbours still loved to repeat? Nicholas Sergéevitch—simple, honest, noble, and disinterested nature that he was—had certainly made a good impression on the prince, as very soon appeared.

The prince had come down to dismiss his steward, a German debauchee,—a man full of ambitious notions; with respectable white hair, an aquiline nose, and spectacles,—who plundered his master shamelessly, and who had maltreated several serfs with the lash. This miserable creature, taken in the act of pillaging his master, played the injured innocent and talked

a great deal about German honesty, but was nevertheless ignominiously dismissed.

The prince needed another steward, and his choice fell on Nicholas Sergéevitch, who was certainly a perfect manager and honest to the full sense and depth of the term, in the sight, and to the knowledge, of all the world. The prince would have liked Ikménief to offer himself as the new steward; but in default of this he decided one fine morning to make the proposal himself in the most friendly terms, and in the form of a humble request. Ikménief refused; but the emoluments, which were very considerable, were seductive to Anna Andréevna, and the amiability of the prince became so increasingly pronounced, that Ikménief's doubts and hesitations vanished, and the prince attained his end at last.

It is clear that the prince excelled in knowledge of human nature; the short space of time in which he had known Ikménief was quite enough for him to understand his man, and that Ikménief must be got at by friendship, by attachment of the heart, without which the temptation of making money would weigh very little with him. What the prince required was a steward in whom he could repose the blindest confidence, so that he never need come back to Vasiliefsky unless he wished. The charm which he exercised over Ikménief was so great that the latter sincerely believed in his friendship.

Ikménief possesses one of those excellent natures found among Russians—artless, ingenuous to a degree, and romantic,—who easily attach themselves to other natures, often quite unworthy of them; who give themselves heart and soul to their friends, and sometimes carry their devotion to a point which approaches the ridiculous.

Years passed; the prince's lands were in a flourishing condition; the prince and his steward had never had the slightest disagreement, and their relations were confined to dry correspondence on business. The prince, who never interfered in the slightest degree with any of Nicholas Sergéevitch's arrangements, sometimes, however, gave Ikménief counsel, which astonished the latter by its practical and intelligent character. It was evident that the prince not only disliked needless expenditure, but quite understood the art of making profits.

Five years after his visit to Vasiliefsky, the prince sent Ikménief orders for the purchase of another estate in the same

Government ; it was a magnificent property of four hundred serfs. Nicholas Sergéevitch was transported with admiration ; he was so much interested in the prince's successes, in the attainment of his objects, in his advancement ; and he worked as hard for the prince's aggrandisement generally, as he would have for that of his own brother.

But his enthusiasm reached its utmost limits when, as I am now about to relate, the prince reposed in him, as steward ; an amount of confidence which was really extraordinary.

However, as the prince is one of the chief actors in my story, I think I had better give a few details of his life, anterior to the events to be related.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

I HAVE already said that the prince was a widower. While still young he had married money ; his family, who had always lived in Moscow, were quite ruined ; his father had left him nothing but the estate at Vasiliefsky, burdened with debt and mortgage, so that at the age of twenty-two he had found himself obliged to enter a Government office in Moscow, for he had not a farthing left in the world, and he began life like the wretched shoot of a good old stock. His marriage with the more than mature daughter of a brandy-monopolist saved him. Although the monopolist of brandy cheated him in the marriage portion, as might have been expected of him, the prince was at least able to clear his paternal acres from debt, and to plant his foot upon his own soil once more.

The merchant's daughter hardly knew how to write her own name, couldn't read two words, was ugly, and had but one merit—she was good and sweet-tempered. The prince well knew how to make the most of these qualities. After a year of married life he left his wife at Moscow—she had just presented him with a son—in charge of her father, and himself went off to the Government of ——— to occupy an important position in the service, a position to which he had been appointed thanks to his own solicitations and to the protection

of an influential relation. He thirsted for distinction ; he was devoured with the strong desire of aggrandisement, to make a career, and since he reckoned that, thanks to his wife's extraction, he could not live either in St. Petersburg or Moscow, he resolved to make his *début* in the provinces and wait for better times.

He treated his wife with the greatest cruelty ; it was said that during the first year of their married life he had very nearly killed her. These reports aroused the greatest indignation in Ikménief, who of course took the prince's part with much warmth, and declared his master to be utterly incapable of any sort of vileness.

At last, after seven years, the prince became a widower and left for St. Petersburg.

His arrival made some sensation in the capital. Still young, handsome, rich, with a hundred brilliant gifts, spiritual, full of taste, gay, and unfailingly good-humoured, he made his entry into society, not as a man who comes to look for fortune and advancement, but as one who has a right to come in with effect. He had, it was said, a sort of prestige which enforced and insisted upon admiration. Women adored him, and an attachment with a certain woman of the world put the glory of a scandal to his account. He spent his money freely, though up till now he had been economical to a point approaching avarice ; he lost at cards where he judged that he would gain by so losing, and that without betraying the slightest emotion however large the sum lost might be.

Count N—— a relation of rank, who would never have deigned to have taken any notice of him if he had simply come forward as a vulgar place-seeker, was struck by his success in society. He thought it not only possible, but even convenient to honour him with some attention, and even took his son, aged seven years, into his own household to be educated.

It was just at this epoch that the prince went to Vasiliefsky and made acquaintance with the Ikméniefs.

By the interest of Count N—— the prince now got the appointment of attaché to one of the principal embassies and went abroad. Countless reports were current, at this time, with regard to the prince and his affairs, but they were always hidden in obscurity and mystery ; men spoke of a disagreeable event which had happened to him abroad, but nobody knew any-

thing certain as to the nature of it. All that was positively known was that the prince was suddenly in a position to purchase an estate of four hundred souls—the same that I mentioned above.

After some years the prince came back to Russia, having attained a high rank in the service, and soon got a good appointment in St. Petersburg. Reports now reached Ikméniefka that he was about to marry again into a rich and powerful family this time. Nicholas Sergéevitch rubbed his hands with glee.

I was in St. Petersburg at the time working at the University, and Ikménief wrote me to inquire as to the truth of the reports about the prince's marriage. He also wrote to the latter recommending me to his kindness, but he received no answer. For my part all that I could find out was that his son had been educated in Count Nainsky's household, and then at the Lyceum, and that his studies were at an end now, at the age of nineteen. I gave Ikménief these pieces of information, and added that the prince was very fond of his son and spoiled him, and had already made projects for his future, all of which I learned from a fellow-student at the University, who knew the young fellow.

One fine morning Ikménief got a letter which astonished him considerably. The prince, who up to now had corresponded with his steward in an exclusively formal business manner, suddenly wrote him a frank, friendly letter about his family affairs. He complained of his son, whose conduct was causing him a good deal of disquiet; he said that, though he did not wish to attach to the mere wantonness of a youth of his age more importance than it deserved (he evidently wished to palliate his son's offences), yet he had resolved to punish him, and frighten him, and therefore he wished to send him down to spend some time with Ikménief—who should act guardian—in the country. The prince put himself entirely in the hands of his "honourable and excellent friend," and of his spouse, and begged them to receive his giddy-head of a son into their family; to make him listen to the voice of reason while in exile; to love him, if possible—but at all events to correct his weakness of character and to inculcate him with "those salutary and rigorous principles which are so necessary in life."

The young prince arrived, and was received into the family like a son. Nicholas Sergéevitch soon loved him as his own daughter Natásha, and soon after, when he quarrelled with the

father, he often thought with joy of his dear Aleósha, as he used to call the young prince, Alexis Petrovitch. He was certainly a charming boy, as pretty and as delicate and nervous as a girl, at the same time gay and ingenuous to a degree, with a heart endowed with candour and accessible to the noblest sentiments; an affectionate disposition, honest and sympathetic—he soon became the idol of the Ikménief family.

He was still a child in spite of his twenty years; and it was difficult to understand why his father, who was said to be so fond of him, had thus exiled him. He had led, they said, a wild, indolent life in the capital, and had refused to enter the Government service, which had much annoyed his father. Ikménief never asked any questions, because he gathered from the prince's letter that he wished to say nothing about the real reasons for his son's exile. According to some rumours, he had been guilty of unpardonable wildness; some talked of a liaison some of a duel, some of losses of most improbable amounts at cards, some even spoke of a sum of money which the young prince had spent, and which belonged to someone else; others attributed the father's action to certain personal considerations of a secret nature, to a calculating and egotistical scheme of the prince's own.

Ikménief repudiated all these rumours with indignation, especially as the young man was greatly attached to his father, whom he had hardly known during his childhood and youth, but of whom he never spoke except with enthusiasm, and whom he evidently regarded with entire submission.

Occasionally Aleósha spoke of some countess, and of a rivalry between his father and himself. It appeared that he had cut out his father in this little affair, which had made the old prince furious. Aleósha used to tell this story with great animation, and with a sort of childish grace, and with a loud and joyous laugh; but Ikménief would stop him at the first words of the tale. Aleósha confirmed the rumours that the prince had matrimonial views for him.

He had now spent about a year in exile, and wrote occasionally to his father—most respectful and reasonable his letters were,—and by this time he was so well acclimatised to Vasiliefsky that when the prince came down in spring on business, as he had promised Ikménief, the exile begged to be allowed to stay on as long as possible, assuring his father that he felt a

real vocation for country-life. Every action, every impulse of Aleósha's proceeded from his excessive impressionability and nervousness, from his warmth of heart, his indolence—which sometimes almost reached the absurd,—from his extraordinary readiness to succumb to any exterior influence, and from his absolute lack of will.

The prince received his son's request with a considerable show of opposition. Ikménief had some difficulty in recognising his old friend, he was so completely changed. He had become mean and petty, and in his examination of the accounts he showed himself sordid, shabby, and disagreeably combative. This was a source of great sorrow to good old Ikménief, who would not credit it at first. However, everything was exactly the reverse of what had happened at the prince's former visit, fourteen years before; he made acquaintance with all the neighbours round—the most important, that is, and never set foot within the Ikméniefs' doors, but treated the latter as inferiors.

Suddenly, one day, something inconceivable happened; without the least apparent cause there was a stormy interview between the prince and Ikménief; violent words were exchanged, offensive epithets were used, and Ikménief left the house, indignant and angry; but that was not the end of it. Odious scandals began to circulate in the district: that Ikménief had studied the character of the young prince in order to make a profit out of his faults; that his daughter, Natásha, had found the way to the young fellow's heart, and that, while pretending to see nothing of it, her parents had secretly encouraged this love; that Natásha, an artful and depraved girl, had entirely bewitched the young prince, who, thanks to her cunning, had never set eyes on a single one of the numerous young girls whose charms were ripening within the family seats of the neighbouring gentry, during the whole year which he had spent here. People went so far as to whisper that the young lovers had arranged to go and get married at Grigorievo, a village about ten miles from Vasiliefsky, nominally unknown to the girl's parents, who, however, in reality were acquainted with the minutest details of the plan, and egged on their daughter by their advice. In short, a thick volume would not hold the wretched gossip which the scandal-mongers of the place, of both sexes, succeeded in circulating.

What was most astonishing of all was that the prince

believed every word of it all ; indeed, he had only come down to Vasiliefsky in consequence of an anonymous communication sent to him at St. Petersburg. It would certainly be supposed that anyone with the smallest knowledge of Ikménief would have refused to believe a word of all this ; and yet, as it often happens in such cases, everyone busied himself with the rumours, talked them over, blamed Ikménief, shook his head, and passed judgment without appeal.

Ikménief had too much proper pride to justify his daughter to a troop of gossipers, and he forbade his wife, solemnly, to enter into any kind of explanation on the subject with her neighbours. Natásha, so cruelly maligned, for the best part of a year never heard a word of all these trumped-up lies and calumnies, and continued to be gay and innocent and happy as a child of twelve.

Meanwhile the quarrel grew more and more envenomed ; the gossipers and scandal-mongers did not sleep ; denouncers of Ikménief turned up, and witnesses who did not fail to prove to the prince that the manner in which Ikménief had administered the affairs of the estate had been far from a model of honest dealing. They went so far as to affirm that three years since, during the sale of a forest, Ikménief had embezzled twelve thousand roubles, which could be proved clearly and legally by witnesses ; and all the more easily because Ikménief had had no procuration from the prince to sell the timber, but had acted on his own initiative, and had only convinced the prince of the necessity for the sale after it was all over, remitting him a sum, as the result of the business, very much smaller than what he had really received.

These were all pure fabrications, as was proved afterwards ; but the prince believed them, and, in presence of witnesses, accused Ikménief of theft. The latter would not bear the affront, and answered the prince with as good measure as he gave. A dreadful quarrel followed, and a lawsuit was begun.

Ikménief soon saw that his case would fail ; he required certain papers, and above all he needed protection and help. He had had absolutely no experience of such matters, and it looked like his losing the case, and his property being put into sequestration. The indignant old man left the place at once, and transported his home to St. Petersburg in order to look after his legal interests in connection with the lawsuit. He left



an agent on his estate in whom he had entire confidence, and set off for the capital.

The prince, doubtless, very soon realised that he had insulted Ikménief quite gratuitously ; but the insults had flowed so freely from both sides that it was impossible now to find place for a word of reconciliation ; and the angry prince did all he could to turn the affair to his own profit, which simply meant taking the last bit of bread out of his old steward's mouth.

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## CHAPTER V.

SO the Ikméniefs went to St. Petersburg. I will not describe my meeting with Natásha, who during the four years of our separation had never for a moment been out of my thoughts. I did not dwell much on my recollection of her, and of the sentiments she had awakened in me in former times, when we again met ; but I know that my first thought now was that Fate had awarded her to me. It seemed to me, at the same time, that she had not developed much, and that she had remained very much the same child-girl of the days before our separation.

As time went on, however, I began to see something new in her every day, something which I seemed to have missed observing before, as though she had concealed it on purpose, as if the girl had wished to dissemble her perfections in my eyes. And, oh ! the joy of those di-coveries ! During the period of his stay in the capital, Ikménief was bilious and irritable ; his affairs were not going well ; he used to get angry, and would bury himself in his papers, and take no notice of us. Anna Andréevna, his wife, was like one lost, and did not know what to do with herself. St. Petersburg was terrible to her ; she was afraid of the place. She would sigh and tremble and bewail the old haunts in which she had passed her life up to now. She would moan that her Natásha had arrived at a marriageable age, and there was nobody who gave her a thought. She became strangely confidential with me, probably because there did not happen to be anybody better qualified to receive her confidences.

I had just finished my first novel—the first-fruits of my literary career; and, as a beginner, I did not know where to place it. I did not tell the Ikméniefs a word about it, and they were nearly ready to quarrel with me for leading a life of indolence—that is without employment, and without doing anything to obtain employment. My adopted father had reproached me severely; and as his censures were dictated by paternal affection towards me, I felt ashamed of telling him how I had spent my time. How could I, in fact, tell him plump out that I did not want to be a “functionary,” and that my function was to write novels? I deceived him, therefore, so far as to tell him that I had not found a place as yet, although I had done all I could to get one. However, he had no time to bother about my affairs just then.

One day Natásha, who had been present at one of my interviews with her father, took me aside, and, with tears in her eyes, besought me to think of my future. She questioned me, and tried to find out how I spent my time; and, as I did not tell her the secret either, she made me swear not to make myself wretched by my sloth and idleness. I did not disclose the nature of my work to her, and yet I am quite sure that one word of encouragement from her would have caused me more joy than all the flattering judgments which I afterwards heard.

My novel appeared at last. Long before its publication it was talked of in the literary world. B—— had rejoiced like a child over my manuscript.

If ever I was happy it was not during the first intoxicating moments of my success, but it was while I had not read or shown my work to a single soul as yet. It was during those long nights of dreaming and of enthusiastic hopes, while I laboured passionately, and lived among the persons whom I had created, as though they were relations, living and breathing and real. I loved them, and shared their joys and sorrows; indeed, I remember now and again being actually moved to tears by the stupidity of one of my heroes.

I cannot describe the joy of the old couple—the Ikméniefs, when they first heard the whisper of my success; their first sensation was blank surprise. Anna Andréevna simply would not believe that this new writer, whom the whole world was praising, was that very Vánia who, etc., etc., and she set to nodding her old head with wonder.

The old man took longer still to realise the thing, and when he first heard the news he was downright startled ; he told me I should lose all chance of making a career in Government service, and spoke to me of the ill-regulated life led by most writers. However, the favourable notices which appeared in the papers, and a few words of praise on my behalf which he heard spoken by men for whom he had the most confiding veneration, caused him to change his opinion. As soon as he saw that I had money, too, and understood how well literary work can be remunerated, his last scruples vanished. Quick to leap from doubt to absolute confidence, as happy as a child for my success, he had abandoned himself all at once to the most foolish aspirations on my account, to day-dreams of the most dazzling description as to my future. Every day he invented some new career for me, and formed some new project, and heaven only knows what these projects of his did not embrace ; he even began to assume towards me a deferential demeanour which he had certainly never put on before. Now and then, his doubts returned and besieged him in the very midst of his most exuberant fancies, disconcerting him entirely. To be an author, a poet ! what a curious line to take up ! Did poets ever make their way in the world ? Did they ever attain honours ? There was nothing to be made of all these scribblers—worthless crew, the whole lot of them !

These doubts and perplexities generally assailed him at the twilight hour ; he was always impressionable, nervous, and suspicious at that time of day especially : Natásha and I knew this, and used to amuse ourselves in the knowledge. I would endeavour to make him take a less pessimistic view of the matter by telling him some story about Soumorokof, who was given the equivalent rank of general ; or about Derjavine, who got a snuff-box full of gold pieces ; I told him how the Empress Catherine personally visited Lomonosoff ; I spoke of Pouschkin, of Gogol.

“ I know, my friend ; I know all that,” he used to say, though likely enough he heard these tales now for the first time in his life. “ I know all that ; but what does comfort me a little in your case is that your hash is not stewed in verse. Verses, my dear boy, are simply absurdity—don’t contradict me ; take that from an old fellow who wishes you well—absurdity, pure waste of time. If college professors go in for rhyiming, that’s another thing ; but for a young fellow of your age to do it, my

dear boy, it's the straight road to the lunatic asylum. Pouschkin is a great man, no one can deny that ; but verses and nothing but verses, simply ephemeral ! not that I have read much poetry. Prose, now, is another thing altogether. The author can instruct, he can talk of patriotism and virtue ; I'm not a good hand at explaining things, but you know what I mean. It's my friendship for you that makes me speak to you so ; however, let's have a look at what you are going to read to us," he concluded, in a patronising tone, the day when I was at last enabled to bring them the book. We were all together sitting round the table after tea. " Now, then," he added, " read us a bit of what you have been scribbling all this time. You have managed to get yourself talked about a good deal ; let's see what there is in it !"

I settled myself to read ; the novel had appeared that very day, and as soon as I had been able to get a copy I had run off with it to the Ikménieffs'. How annoyed I had been to be unable to read it to them sooner ; but the manuscript had been in the publisher's hands.

Natásha had wept for indignation ; she had scolded me and said that I allowed strangers to read my novel before her. Well, here we were at last assembled ! the father assumed an air of extraordinary solemnity ; he was prepared to bring the most severe criticism to bear upon the work ; he wished to form his own opinion on it, and to convince himself as to its merits. The old lady, too, had assumed a far more serious air than she usually wore ; she had even put on a new cap expressly in honour of the reading. For a long time she had been aware that I regarded her Natásha with infinite love, that my spirit dwelt on her image, that my eyes dimmed when I spoke to her, and that Natásha, in her turn, now looked at me more brightly than before. Yes, the time was now near when success should realise golden hopes, and bring me the happiness I longed for.

She had also observed the tendency on her husband's part, of late, to praise me extravagantly, and to look at me and his daughter with a new and peculiar expression on his face, and she suddenly took fright ; I was neither count, nor prince, nor reigning duke. If only I had been, in default of higher things, at least a counsellor—a fine young fellow just out of the law-schools, full of wisdom and honours ! When the old lady got into this groove of thought, she never liked to halt by the way or stick at trifles.

## CHAPTER VI.

I READ the whole of my novel at one sitting, which lasted till two in the morning. The old man had, at first, contracted his eyebrows; he expected something exalted, inaccessible; something which perhaps even he would scarcely be able to take in at once, but at all events something decidedly lofty in its aim; instead of which he discovered very soon that he was only going to get ordinary everyday incident, and the very same sort of humdrum events that go on around one at all times. If I had only had some grand type of a hero, now; some individual of extraordinary merit, some historical personage like Youri Miloslafsky or Koslaffief; but no, I dished up a poor devil of a clerk, obscure, and decidedly foolish, one whose shabby coat had lost all its buttons, and all this in as simple a narrative-form as I could adopt—in fact, in the same sort of language that we all use in everyday life among ourselves. It certainly was rather singular on my part! Anna Andréevna glanced at her husband with inquiring eye, slightly offended, as though she fancied herself the least little bit hurt by the particular line I had taken up.

“Were these wretched details really worth printing and reading, and who on earth is going to buy them?” she seemed to ask.

Natásha was all attention; she listened with avidity, and never took her eyes off me; and with every word I uttered her sweet lips moved with mine. Well, I had not read half the book when I made them all cry. The old lady wept in all sincerity; she was sorry, with all the depth of her kind soul, for my hero's woes, and would have gladly helped him if she could, to judge from her exclamations. Ikménief had renounced his dreams of an exalted ideal.

“We can see from the first page,” he said, “that this is going to be a long business. It's not bad; a simple little story, of course, but it lays hold of one for all that; the accessory circumstances are all nice easy reading too, and no strain to the memory; and one sees that even the obscurest individual is always a man, and can lay claim to the title of brother.”

Natásha listened, cried, and stealthily pressed my hand hard, under cover of the table. At the conclusion of my reading, she raised her burning cheeks and wet eyes, then she

suddenly seized my hand, pressed it to her lips, and rushed out of the room ; the father and mother exchanged glances.

"There! she's romantic!" said the old man. "Well! there's no great harm in that, she's a good little girl," he added with an absent look at his wife. He said it as if he wanted to justify both his daughter and me at the same time. But Anna Andréevna, in spite of her emotion during my reading, seemed to have relapsed into a less enthusiastic mood. Looking at her, I could not help thinking of the quotation:—

"Alexander of Macedon is a hero, certainly; but that's no reason for breaking the chairs!"

Natásha very soon came in again, radiant and happy-looking, and gave me a little pinch as she passed by me. Ikménief now commenced to criticise my book seriously, but his joy soon made him entirely forget the austere character he had assumed, and he lost no time in relapsing into enthusiasm.

"Do you know it's very good, Vánia; it's really very good; you have relieved my feelings; you've consoled me more than I should have believed possible; your book is not an ambitious work, of course; it's not *great* evidently. I've got 'Moscow saved,' now, there! From the very first word one feels oneself raised above this earth like an eagle! while with your novel—it's a much simpler affair altogether, much easier to lay hold of. That's what I like about it, you know it's so easy to understand; it comes near to one as it were; it seems as if all the events were happening to oneself. After all, what's the use of the sublime, if one doesn't understand what the man is driving at! At the same time, it would not be a bad thing to change your style a little. I give you all praise, but, say what you like, you do lack sublimity. However, it's too late to do anything, now the thing is printed. Perhaps in the second edition—who knows? there'll be a second edition, I suppose? and perhaps more cash, eh?"

"Is it true, Ivan Petrovitch, that you get a good deal for this sort of thing?" asked Anna Andréevna. "The more I look at you the more impossible it all seems! Good heavens, what things people do spend their money on!"

"Look here, Vánia," Ikménief struck in, getting more and more interested in the subject, "of course this scribbling is not equal to the service of the State; but still, it is a sort of career all the same. People of rank will read you. You say Gogol got a pension and was sent abroad? Well, who knows

but you, too, may be, eh? or is it too early to think of that yet, eh? It is too soon yet, perhaps; you'll have to write something else first. If that's the case, all I can say is, write, write! peg away, my boy, peg away! don't rest on your laurels, you must strike while the iron's hot!"

He said all this with such an air of conviction, and with such warmth of heart, that I hadn't the courage to stop him and cool his enthusiasm.

"They'll give you a snuff-box, too," he went on. "Why not? it'll encourage you; and—who knows?—you may get an invitation to Court!" He said this in a whisper and with a wink of his left eye.

"No? Why? Is it too soon to get asked to Court?"

"That's good," said the mother, "you've got him an entrée to Court already, have you?"

"You'll be giving me the rank of a general next," I said, laughing heartily. The old man laughed, too; he was as happy as possible just now. "Come and have something to eat, general," said Natásha who had been getting supper ready meanwhile, and she burst out laughing in a nervous way, and threw herself into her father's arms.

"Dear good father," she said, overcome with emotion. Ikménief was moved too.

"All right, my darling," he said, "we are all joking; but, general or no general, let's have supper. What a sensible little woman it is," he added, patting Natásha's blushing cheeks.

"You know, Vania, all I say about this is simply prompted by my friendship for you. You must see that; and, whether you become a general or not, at all events you are a public man, now, you are an author!"

"They call them 'writer' nowadays, father!"

"Not author? I wasn't aware of the fact; very well, a *writer* then; but what I was going to say was that, though perhaps you won't be made a groom of the bed-chamber for having written a novel (it's clear, we must not expect all that at once), still you will be *somebody*. You may be appointed an attaché to one of the embassies; you may be sent abroad for your health, or to study your art; or the State may give you a money subsidy. Of course, anything you get must be earned by yourself, not gained by favour. Your wealth will be the honourable result of your own labours."

"In that case, you'll never need to be proud," struck in Anna Andréevna, laughing.

"Oh, father, let him at least have a star on his breast!" cried Natásha; "attaché to an embassy! why, that's a miserable reward for him!" She pinched my arm again.

"There she goes, chaffing me again," said the old man, looking at Natásha with pride. Her cheeks were on fire, and her eyes were shining like two stars.

"Well, perhaps, I did go a little too far, children," he said. "I am always like that; but you know, for all your glory, Vánia, when I look at you, I don't seem to see anything extraordinary about you."

"Why, good heavens! father, what would you expect to see in him?"

"No, no, it's not that; that's not what I mean. I mean I don't see anything in the least poetical about your face. You know, poets are said to be pale; and then their hair, and their eyes—they look something like this, you know—Goethe, and those sort of people—I've read that in an almanac. Well—what! have I said anything absurd? There's that little rogue laughing at my expense again. My dear friend, I am not a deeply-read individual, but I have a good deal of sensibility. Your face is not so bad, you know, it's not a bad face; I like your face very well. That's not what I was going to say, though. The principal thing, my boy, is be honest, be a good fellow, lead an upright life, and don't have too good an opinion of yourself. You have a fair future before you, make the most and best of it—there, that's what I wanted to say; that's *just* what I have been trying to get said all this time."

What a splendid time that was. I spent all my evenings at the Ikinéiefs', and all my spare moments too, and I told the old man all the literary news—all about the authors, who had, somehow, lately begun to be a subject of great interest to him. He even began to read the articles of a certain reviewer of whom I had spoken to him a good deal. He didn't understand a word of these articles, but he praised them up to the skies.

The old mother kept watch and ward over us—Natásha and I; but we were quite equal to eluding her vigilance. We entirely understood each other—she and I. She had told me, bending her pretty head low, in sweet confusion, that she loved me; the old folks knew it, and pondered over the matter;



the old lady went about shaking her head—she lacked confidence in my position. “You’ve had a good success this time,” she said to me; “but supposing that next time you *don’t* succeed, or if anything were to happen to you, what should you do? If only you had some fixed employment!”

“As for me,” said the old gentleman, after having reflected for a moment, “I’ve seen it all, I noticed it, and I confess I was really glad to see that Natásha and you. . . there could be no harm in it, but, my wife is right there, you *are* too young, both of you. Now listen to me; you have talent, *great* talent, I admit, but they went too far when they called it genius. Well then, you have talent (I’ve just been reading a criticism in which you are woefully cut up), but talent means nothing. You see talent is not a balance at one’s banker’s, and both of you are poor. Wait a year, a year and a half; if all goes well, if you get on in your chosen line, Natásha is yours. If you *don’t* succeed—judge for yourself, you are an honest fellow—think now.”

And so we waited, and a year after this we were still waiting. Yes, it was just about a year after, that one lovely clear September evening, I went to my old friends’ house, ill, and with a feeling of despair in my soul, and, as soon as I arrived there, I fell into a chair in an almost fainting condition, much to the alarm of the good people.

But if my head throbbed and my heart was full of anguish at that time, the reason was not that I had of late, on ten consecutive occasions, come as far as Ikménief’s door, and ten times turned and gone back again; it was not that I had not as yet achieved real success in my career; that as yet I had won neither glory nor hard cash; that I had not been appointed attaché to an embassy; or that I was still as far as ever from being sent by an admiring Fatherland to recruit my health in Italy. No! My anguish of heart arose from the fact, which I had learned this year, that a human being may live ten years in one, and that my poor Natásha had lived ten years in these last twelve months, as well as myself. And now a great abyss was stretched between her and me.

The old mother gazed at me with compassionate eyes; her sympathy hurt me, for it seemed to say, “This is the man to whom I very nearly gave my daughter.”

“Take a cup of tea, Ivan Petrovitch,” she said (the urn was on the table). “How are you now? Are you still ailing?”

She spoke to me in such a sad, plaintive voice ; the sound of it still rings in my ears.

While addressing me, her eyes showed that she was thinking of something else, some other cares, probably the same which shadowed the old man's face, as he sat motionless and lost in thought. They were very anxious just now about the latest stage of the lawsuit, it was making old Ikménief quite ill.

The young prince, who had been the primary cause of the quarrel, had found an opportunity, some months before, to pay them a visit.

Ikménief, who loved Aleósh like his own son, and who hardly passed a day without mentioning his name, had been overjoyed to see him. His wife said it reminded her of Vasiliefsky, and tears came to her eyes. The young prince's visits very soon became more frequent, and Ikménief who was the impersonation of all candour and honesty, scorned to take any precautionary measures ; full of a fine pride, he would not even think of what the old prince might say when he learned that his son was once more a constant visitor at the Ikméniefs' house. The old man considered that the prince's absurd suspicions must simply be treated with sublime contempt, and not further noticed.

The young prince's visits soon became a daily occurrence ; he used to pass entire evenings with the old people, delighted to be with them, and did not leave until long after midnight.

The old prince, heard all about it, of course, and the affair gave rise to the most abominable gossiping and scandal-mongering. He sent Nicholas Sergéevitch an insulting letter, and categorically forbade his son to go near the Ikméniefs'. This was just a fortnight before my visit.

The old man was dreadfully cut up ; his Natásha—pure, innocent child that she was—implicated again in these dirty calumnies ; her name outraged by this man of all others, the same who had insulted him so grossly ! and he must bear it, too, without demanding satisfaction.

The first few days his despair made him quite ill.

All these details I had heard at home, although owing to my illness, and depressed as I was with my worries, I had not been near the Ikméniefs' for three weeks. But I knew—it was but a presentiment as yet—but I knew well enough, though I did not dare to let my thoughts dwell upon it, that there was something else to trouble them more than these worries or

anything else in the world, and I watched them with the keenest anxiety.

It was anguish to me. I was afraid of thinking of it. I did not dare to guess at it. I did all I could, with all my might, to postpone the fatal moment. But it was for her sake I had come. I felt that something drew me to her side this evening.

"Well," said old Ikménief, suddenly, as if just waking up from a nap, "have you been ill or what, that we haven't seen you for so long? I am to blame, I know; I ought to have been to see you, but there was always something—" Here he relapsed into his musings again.

"I have been rather seedy lately," I said.

"Ha! seedy," he repeated after a few minutes, "seedy: I've often told you to take care of yourself, you never will listen. My dear Vánia, from time immemorial the muse has had to content herself with starvation in a garret, and it appears she still has to do so."

The old man was evidently in a bad humour. He must have had a sore heart to talk to me like that.

I had a good look at him; his face was yellow, his eyes wore a look of perplexity; one could read in them a thought, a question which he had not the strength to answer. He was bilious and irritable to an unusual extent.

His wife looked at him anxiously, and with much head-shaking. She took the opportunity, when the old man turned round, to make me a stealthy sign expressive of her anxiety.

"And how is Natásha," I asked. "Is not she at home?"

"Yes, she is at home," said the mother, whom my question seemed to embarrass a good deal; "she will come and do herself the pleasure of taking a glimpse of you. You think that a joke, do you? Why, it's *three* weeks since you last saw each other! She's so changed, too; and we can't understand what it is; whether she's well or ill—or anything. God help her," she added, looking at her husband anxiously.

"No, no; it's all right; there's nothing the matter with her," said the latter, crossly; "she's not ill. She's all right. All girls are like that at her age. Who on earth is going to make head or tail of the sorrows and caprices of a young girl?"

"Caprices," said the mother; "I don't think you ought to call it that."

The old man said nothing, but drummed with his fingers on

the table. I wondered whether they had had any conversation about it.

"Well, and what's new with you?" asked the old man again. "What is B—— doing? Does he still review?"

"Yes, he still writes a good deal," I said.

"Ah, Vánia," he went on, and making a gesture as though putting a finishing touch to the conversation, "what is the good of all this criticising?"

Just then the door opened, and Natásha appeared.

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## CHAPTER VII.

SHE came in with her hat in her hand; she went and laid it down on the piano, then advanced towards me and gave me her hand without a word. Her lips moved slightly; she wanted to say something to me—some courteous formula, but no words came. We had not seen each other for three weeks; and I was shocked by the change in her. My heart stopped beating when I saw her pale and hollow cheeks, her lips parched with fever, and her eyes which shone like fire beneath her dark lashes—they seemed to shine with the fire of some passionate resolve.

But, oh, how lovely she was! I had never seen her so beautiful as on this fatal day. Could this be that same Natásha who, but a short year ago, used never to take her eyes off me; and whose lips had trembled in sympathy with mine, when I had read my novel; who had laughed and chaffed so unaffectedly with her father and me during that supper? Could this be that same Natásha who, there, in the next room, her eyes drooped and her shy cheeks burning-red, had given me her heart in that little "yes"?

Just then a church-bell near—a deep grave sound it had—rang out for vespers. The young girl trembled; the old mother crossed herself.

"There are vespers sounding," she said. "You want to go, Natásha; go, darling—go and pray, by all means. It is not far, and you'll get a little walk. You don't go out enough;

you always look so pale, nowadays, one would think somebody had thrown a spell over you."

"I don't think I will go to-day," she said slowly, and scarcely audibly; she seemed to be almost choking. "I don't feel quite myself," and she grew as pale as a corpse.

"Why won't you go, my little one? You wanted to go just now; you've even got your hat to go. Go, darling; go and pray God to give you health again," said the mother encouragingly.

"Yes, yes, by all means! You'll get a little air at the same time," added the old man. He, too, looked at his daughter anxiously. "Your mother is quite right. Vánia will go with you."

I thought I observed a bitter smile cross Natásha's lips. She got her hat, and put it on; her hand was trembling. She seemed to be acting automatically, without knowing what she did. Her father and mother watched her with astonishment.

"Good-bye," she said, in a scarcely audible voice.

"Why good-bye, my darling?" said the mother. "You won't be long, it's quite a short distance; come, you'll get a little air, and that will do you good. You're so pale, little one. Oh dear, I'd forgotten all about it! (I forget everything just now) I've finished that little case for you, and stitched the prayer inside it. A man at Kief showed me how to do it last year; it's a very efficacious prayer, my birdie. Take it, darling; take it with you, and perhaps the good God will send you back your health. We have only you," and she took from her work-box the golden cross that Natásha always wore at her neck; the little case which she had worked was tied on to the same piece of ribbon.

"God give you health," she said, as she put the ribbon round Natásha's neck, and made the sign of the cross. "There was a time when I used to do this every evening," she sobbed. "I used to say a prayer, and you repeated it after me, before you went to sleep; but now you are not the same, and God does not give you the same tranquillity of spirit. Oh, Natásha, Natásha! my maternal prayers don't help you, they don't do you any good!" and she cried bitterly.

Natásha kissed her mother's hand, in silence, and made a step in the direction of the door, but suddenly she turned and approached her father quickly, her breast heaving.

"Father, you must bless me, too ; bless your daughter," she said in suffocating tones ; and she fell on her knees before the old man.

We were all troubled strangely at this most unexpected conduct on her part. The old father looked at her for a moment, bewildered.

"Natásha, my darling, my little one, my own dear little daughter, what is the matter with you, girlie ?" he cried at last, the tears running down his cheeks ; "tell me your sorrow. Why do you cry day and night, what is it my darling ? I see it all, you know ; I don't sleep at night any better than you do, and I hear you crying. Tell me all about it, my Natásha ; tell your old father all your troubles, my birdie, and we—." He did not finish, but he took her in his arms and clasped her close to him.

She pressed herself convulsively to the old man's breast, and hid her head on his shoulder.

"Nothing, nothing, I'm a little unwell, that's all," she said ; and her voice sounded as though suffocating with the tears which she was trying to keep down.

"May God bless you, even as I give you my blessing now, my darling, my precious child," said her father ; "and may He send you peace from this time forth, and keep you from all harm ! Pray to God, my darling, that my prayers may reach Him, sinner as I am."

"My blessing go with you also," added her mother weeping.

"Good-bye," said Natásha, in a faint voice.

When she got to the door she stopped and looked once again at them ; she seemed to wish to say something more, but had not strength, and rushed rapidly out of the room. I darted after her, with the presentiment of evil rife within me.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

SHE walked quickly, in silence, her head was bent low, and she did not look at me. But when we got to the end of the street, on the quay of the river Neva, she stopped suddenly and took my hand.

"I'm choking," she said; "I'm choking."

"Come back, Natásha," I cried; "come home again." I was quite frightened.

"Don't you see that I have gone away never to return?" she said, looking at me with an expression of indescribable anguish.

My heart stopped beating. I had felt that this must come, and yet her words fell on me like a thunderclap.

We walked sadly along the quay. I could not speak, I tried to think. I felt entirely lost. My head was whirling, all this seemed so monstrous, so impossible!

"You think me very much to blame, Vánia," she said at last.

"No, but—I can't believe it, it cannot be!" I answered, not knowing what I was saying.

"And yet it is all true," she said, "and I don't know what will become of them; I am leaving them. I don't even know what will become of myself."

"You are going to *him*?"

"Yes," she said.

"But the thing is impossible," I cried, excitedly; "you know it's impossible, Natásha. My poor Natásha, it is madness! It will kill *them*; and you—you are lost, lost! Don't you know it, Natásha?"

"Yes, I know it," she said, "but I can do nothing; it is not of my own will." Her words betrayed the same sort of despair of mind as though she were on her way to the scaffold.

"Return, return, while it is not too late, Natásha!" I entreated, with all the solemnity of which I was capable; but I knew my exhortation was both useless and absurd. "Then, have you thought of your father? You know how bitterly at enmity are *his* father and yours—that his father insulted your own, accused him of embezzlement, called him a thief? You know that they are this moment at law, and that, last but not least—good God, you must know this!—that he has suspected your parents of having designedly encouraged you to form this connection with Aleósha, while he was with you in the country. Remember how your poor father has suffered by these calumnies. His hair has turned white with it. I don't say a word of what it must cost them to lose you; *you*, their treasure; *you*, who are all that remains to them in their old age. You know

all that yourself, Natásha. But remember *this*, that your father believes you as innocent as a babe, and the victim of the malignant suspicions of all these haughty gentry. The old animosity between your father and his has burst out anew since Aleósha's late visits to your house. His father has insulted yours again; and, while the wound of this last insult is still open, suddenly both this and all the other accusations are to be justified by your conduct. All those who have heard of these insinuations and accusations against you and your father, will now be able to say that the prince was in the right after all. What will become of your father? It will kill him; the shame, the infamy of it all will kill him; and at whose hands is the blow? At yours, Natásha—his ewe-lamb, his daughter, his darling. And your mother; do you think she will survive the old man's death? Natásha, Natásha, think of it all! awake to your own self again; come back, Natásha!"

She was silent, but I read in her eyes such an intensity of sorrow, such terrible suffering, that I understood how much her heart was bleeding even without the added reproach of my words. I saw how much it had cost her to make up her mind to this action, and how terribly I had just tortured her—lacerated her by my tardy and useless representations. And yet I felt that I must go on.

"A moment ago you told your mother that *perhaps* you would not go out,—would not go to vespers. This shows that you had, at all events at that moment, the wish to stay—that your mind was not absolutely made up."

She smiled bitterly. Why did I talk like this? I could see that her mind *was* irrevocably made up. I could bear it no longer.

"Do you love him so madly, then?" I cried. My heart was full of dread for her, and I hardly knew what I was saying.

"What do you want me to say, Vánia?" she said. "You see I do! He has bid me come; and I have come—and await him."

"But listen," I cried, catching at a straw; "surely you can make some better arrangement. It can all be done differently. There is nothing to make you leave home. I'll tell you how you must arrange matters, Natásha, my beloved. I'll make all the arrangements for you myself—the rendezvous and everything; but, oh! *don't* leave home! I'll see that you get your letters. Why shouldn't I do this? Oh, Natásha, it's far better



than what you want to do. I can, I know I can arrange things for you ; you'll be quite content. You really will, my Natasha, you'll see ; and at least then you are not lost ; for oh ! Natasha, if you do this you are lost, lost. All shall go well and pleasantly for you. I'll see to it ; and you shall love each other as well as ever you please ; and—and then when your fathers have finished quarrelling, as they must end their squabble sooner or later, then you——”

“Vánia, Vánia, stop !” she interrupted me, seizing my hand and pressing it, and smiling through her tears. “My dear, my good Vánia ! you are so loyal and so honest. You don't say a word about yourself. I have betrayed you, and you forgive me ; and you can think of nothing but *my* happiness. Would you really see that we had our letters ?” She began to weep. “I know, Vánia, how much you have loved me—how much you love me even now ; and yet you have not uttered a single reproachful word, not a bitter thought ; and I—I—good God ! to think of my guilt towards you, Vánia ! You remember all the good time we have spent together. It would have been well if I had never known, never even seen *him* ! I should have been so happy with you, dear old friend. I am not worthy of you. But why do I recall our past happiness ; what is the use of reminding you of all this ? You were three weeks without coming to see me, and I swear to you that never once in all that time did it strike me that you could hate or curse me. I knew all this while that you did not come solely because you did not wish to be a standing reproach to me—an obstacle to my possible happiness. I knew it must be painful to you to see us ; and yet, I did long to see you. I love Aleósha madly ; but sometimes it seems to me that I love you still better as my friend. I could never live without you. You are necessary to me, my Vánia—you and your heart of gold ! Oh, the future, the dreadful future, full of bitterness as it must be !”

She burst into tears.

“And I did so *require* to see you,” she went on, stifling her tears. “You are thin and pale ; you have been ill, Vánia, and I didn't even ask you about it. I talked of nothing but myself ! And what are you doing now, Vánia ? How does the novel get on ?”

“The devil take my novels ! Tell me, did Aleósha insist on your eloping with him ?”

"It was more my own doing. He certainly did say—wait, I'd better tell you all. They want to marry him to a girl of rank and immense wealth; his father—you know the scheming nature of the man—insists on his marrying her, and will do his utmost to force him to it, because he won't get such another chance—rank, colossal fortune; and, besides that, the girl herself is very pretty, very well read, and an angel of goodness. Aleósha himself is taken with her; and as his father is anxious to get Aleósha off his hands as soon as possible, in order to marry again himself, the prince is determined to separate us, anyhow he can, but somehow. He fears my influence over his son."

"But is he aware of your relations with his son?" I asked, interrupting her.

"He knows all."

"Who told him about it?"

"Aleósha told him everything."

"Good heavens! What does he mean by that? He told his father, and at such a moment?"

"Don't blame him! don't laugh at him! It would not be fair to judge him as you would anyone else. He is a child; and a child who has been brought up quite differently from ourselves. You must not suppose he knows what he does. The first impression, the first influence exerted over him, is quite enough to cause him to renounce everything he swore by a moment before. He has absolutely *no* force of character. He is yours one day, and the same evening he is another's, and in perfectly good faith; and he is the first to come and tell you of it. He might do something dreadful; and it would be impossible to know whether one should blame him or weep for him. He is capable of sacrificing himself altogether, but only until the next impression, and then it's all forgotten again; and *he will forget me too, if I am not always by him.*"

"Very likely this marriage you talk about is simply a false rumour. How can he marry? he's a child!"

"I tell you his father has his own calculations and schemes."

"How do you know the girl is so pretty, and that Aleósha it taken by her?"

"He told me so himself."

"What! *he* told you that he might fall in love with another girl, and yet asked you to sacrifice everything for his sake?"

“No, no ; you don't know him ! You have not seen enough of him ; you ought to know him better before judging him. There doesn't exist a more honest or a purer heart than his. Would it have been any better if he had told a lie about it ? That he allowed himself to be taken with her is not very surprising. Were he to be a week without seeing me, he would very likely go and fall in love with somebody else, but so soon as he saw me again he would be mine once more. I am very glad he tells me all ; I should die of jealousy if he did not. I have quite made up my mind. *If I do not remain constantly at his side, he will cease to love me ; he'll forget me, and leave me.* I know him so well. Every woman he sees might seduce him ; and then what would become of me ? I should die ! That would not matter much ; for death would be nothing but a happiness to me ! To live without *him*—that would be far worse than death, worse than torture. Oh, Vánia, Vánia ! you must see that I love him very much, when I leave my father and mother like this for his sake. Don't reason with me. I am quite determined. I *must* have him by me every hour, every moment ! I can't go back now. I know that I am lost if I go—I know it ! and that others are ruined by me too. Oh, Vánia !” she cried suddenly, trembling ; “if he really had ceased to love me ; if what you have just said were really true—that he was simply deceiving me” (I had not said anything of the sort) ; “if he were only honest and true in appearance, but in reality were wicked and deceptive ! And I here standing up for him against your arguments, when perhaps, he is with some other girl the whole time, and laughing at me—while I, wretched creature, have left everything for him, and am walking about the streets looking for him. Oh, Vánia !”

She moaned and sobbed so miserably that I was quite alarmed for her. I could see that she had lost all command over herself. The blindest jealousy, and nothing but that, could have forced her to take a step so senseless as this. Jealous in my turn, I could not contain myself, but allowed words to escape me which were basely unkind.

“I don't understand how you can possibly continue to love him after what you have told me about him. You don't esteem him ; you don't trust his love for you ; and yet you run away for him, and deal a death-blow to all those who are dear to you. Think what you are doing ! You are preparing bitter-

ness and misery for each other; you are blind. I don't understand this sort of love."

"Yes, I love him madly; I know it."

She was pale with anguish and grief.

"I never loved you like this, Vánia. I know well enough that I have lost my wits, and that I ought not to love him like this. I have felt for long, and I feel now, I felt it in my happiest moments, that there was nothing but pain and torment before me; but what am I to do if torments that come from him are happiness to me? I know what is before me, and what I shall have to suffer. He has sworn to love me. He has made me all kinds of promises; and I have no faith in his promises. I do not trust them, and never did; yet I know that he has never lied to me and that he is incapable of lying. I have told him, of my own accord, that I do not wish to bind him in anything; nobody likes being bound. I hate it myself. I am happy in being his slave—his voluntary slave, and to suffer anything he likes if only he be with me, near me, and I can see him and look at him. It almost seems to me that I could put up with his loving someone else if only I might be there, at his side. What baseness, isn't it, Vánia?" she cried, suddenly looking at me with burning face. "I know that it is baseness; and yet if he abandoned me I would run after him to the world's end, even if he repulsed me and drove me away. You ask me to change my mind and go back. What would be the use? I should go away again to-morrow, if he called me. He has only to call me—to whistle for me like his dog, and I would follow him at once. I fear no torments, if they come from him. I should know it came from him, and — Oh, Vánia! one can't describe one's feelings."

She seemed to have forgotten all about her father and mother.

"Has not he told you that he wanted to marry you?"

"Oh, yes, he promised me; he has promised everything. He told me that we should go off quietly to-morrow out of town, and get married; but he doesn't know himself what he says. I don't think he even knows what steps to take to get married. What a singular husband he would make. And if he were to marry he would reproach me for it afterwards. I don't want him to have anything to reproach me for. I don't exact anything from him. If his marrying me is

to make him unhappy afterwards, why should I be the cause of unhappiness to him?"

"Natásha, you are simply vapouring," I said; "and now are you going straight to him?"

"No, he promised to come and fetch me from here." She looked impatiently up the street, but there seemed to be no one about.

"And yet he hasn't come. He has allowed you to be first at the rendezvous!" I cried with indignation. My exclamation caused her to shiver, and her face took an expression of suffering.

"Perhaps he won't come at all," she said with a smile of bitterness. "He wrote to me the day before yesterday, that if I did not promise to come he would be obliged to put off our flight and marriage to a later date, and that his father was going to take him down to his betrothed. Oh, Vánia! if he should be with *her* now!"

I made no reply. She pressed my hand hard, and her eyes shone like fire.

"He is with her," she said, so faintly that I could scarcely hear her. "He hoped that I would not come, so that he might go to her, and say afterwards that it was my fault, that, in spite of his letter, I didn't come. I am an incubus to him, and he is leaving me. Oh, *fool* that I am! and he told me the last time I saw him that I *loved* him! Why do I wait for him?"

"There he is!" I suddenly exclaimed, on seeing him some way off, on the Quay. Natásha trembled, and gave a cry as she saw Aleósha. Then she let go of my hand, and ran to meet him. The street was nearly empty. They flew into each other's arms, and kissed and laughed. Natásha was crying and laughing at the same time; her cheeks were scarlet, and she seemed to be in a frenzy of ecstasy. Aleósha saw me, and came up.

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## CHAPTER IX.

I LOOKED at him as though I saw him now for the first time. Yet I had often seen him. I searched his face as though I expected to find something there to dissipate my anguish and

explain how a child like him had managed to bewitch Natásha, and inspire her with a love so mad—a love which had caused her to forget her first duties and to sacrifice, madly, everything that she had held most sacred up to now.

He pressed my hand warmly, and his sweet and calm gaze went to my heart. I felt that I might easily be deceived in my estimate of him, because, and solely because, he was my rival. For I did not like him, and had never changed my opinion—though everyone else seemed to love him. I did not even like his elegant, too elegant, exterior. He was a tall, slender, well-proportioned young fellow. His face was oval—always pale, his hair light, and he had big blue eyes—sweet and dreamy, which shone at times with the frankest and most childlike happiness. His full red lips—beautifully chiselled, nearly always had a serious expression on them; but when he laughed such an ingenuous, naïve smile suddenly played over them, that one could not help laughing back. He always looked neat, and this grace, which he evinced in everything, gave him no effort.

He had, certainly, several tricks—certain bad habits of society—thoughtlessness, conceit, and a kind of impertinence which was full of politeness; but, being gifted with a simplicity of mind and a serenity which was very remarkable, he was always the first to acknowledge his faults and to laugh at them.

I don't think he could lie, even in joke, or, if he did, he did it quite unconsciously.

Even his selfishness seemed to possess an attraction, perhaps because he showed it with so much candour—there was no deceit in his composition.

Weak, sanguine, and timid of heart, he had absolutely no will. To insult him or to deceive him would have wounded him sorely; it would be as sinful as deceiving or wronging a child. Innocent in an incredible degree for one of his age, he knew hardly anything of life. I should think he would scarcely know any more when he got to forty years old. Some people seem to be condemned to wait for ever before they come of age. I am sure no one could help loving him, he knew how to get at one with his childlike ways. Natásha was right. Under the influence of some wicked person he might easily be led to commit a wicked action, but he would certainly die of remorse when he learned the consequences of it.

Natásha felt instinctively that she would begin by being his sovereign, his queen, and end by being his victim. She had a foretaste of the rapture of loving to madness and of tormenting the one we love, simply because we do love him or her, and perhaps this is why she hastened to sacrifice herself first.

His eyes were sparkling with love, now, and he was looking at Natásha in a sort of ecstasy. She had forgotten everything—parents, farewells, jealous suspicions, everything. She was happy.

“Vánia,” she said, “I wronged him. I am not worthy of him; forget my wicked words.” Then she looked at him with unspeakable love in her eyes, and added—

“I thought you were not coming!”

Aleósha kissed her hand, and said to me:—

“Don’t blame me, please. I have long wanted to greet you as a brother. The things she has told me about you! We have seen very little of each other, and have hardly ever spoken to each other. Let us be friends, and—— You must forgive us,” he added, lowering his voice and blushing.

“Yes, yes,” cried Natásha, “he is ours; he is our friend and brother for ever; he has forgiven us already, for we could never be happy without him. I have told him so already. Oh, Vánia,” she went on, her lip trembling, “go back to *them*; they know your heart of gold, and even if they won’t forgive me, when they see that *you* have forgiven me, perhaps they may soften a little towards me. Tell them everything, Vánia, in words that come straight from your heart; take my part and champion me to them; tell them everything as you see it yourself. I don’t know that I should have been able to decide to leave to-day, if you had not called. When I saw you, I felt a hope that perhaps you would be able to soften the shock of my going away for them. Oh, God! oh, God! Vánia, tell them that I know forgiveness is impossible. If they forgive me, God will not; and if they curse me, tell them I shall not bless them the less. I shall pray for them all my life. My heart is whole and full towards them. Oh! why can’t we all be happy? Why? oh, Vánia! What am I doing?” she said suddenly, as though waking up to her own self again; and she covered her face with her hands.

Aleósha took her and pressed her in his arms. We were all silent for a few moments.

"And you could bring yourself to exact a sacrifice like this?" I cried, looking at Alcósha reproachfully.

"Don't blame me," he said; "all this sorrow will only last a short time. I am certain of it. All we want is a little strength to get through this ordeal. Natásha thinks the same. You know the cause of all this is that family quarrel—the lawsuit, and all that; but (I've thought over it a good deal, I assure you) all the trouble will very soon come to an end now. We shall be a united family once more, and our parents, when they see how happy we are, will forgive us and be reconciled to us again. Who knows?—perhaps our wedding will be the first step towards their reconciliation. It *must* be. What do you think?"

"You talk of marriage, but when do you propose to be married?" I asked, looking at Natásha.

"To-morrow, or the day after at latest. I don't know quite for certain myself, and I haven't arranged anything as yet, it's true. I thought that very likely Natásha would not come to-day; and, besides, my father wanted to take me to my betrothed this evening (you know, of course, that they want to marry me off—Natásha has told you all about it, but I don't want to marry the girl); so that I couldn't count on anything with certainty for to-day. In any case, we shall be married by the day after to-morrow, at least I think so, and it can't be otherwise. To-morrow we'll go down by the Pskoff road; there's one of my fellow-students at the Lyceum, a capital fellow, who lives down there. We'll find a priest in the village near him. I'm not quite certain that there is one. I ought to have found out all about it first, but I hadn't time. However, all this is mere detail. We can always get a priest from some village near, can't we? It is a pity that I had not time to write a few lines to let my friend know; he may not be at home. Hang it, it doesn't matter; where there's a will there's a way. Meanwhile, Natásha will stay at my place till to-morrow. I have hired apartments for us to live in when we come back. You will understand, I don't want to live with my father then. You'll come to see us, and my old Lyceum friends will come, too, and we'll have jolly little evenings."

I looked at him with anguish of heart. Natásha's face seemed to bespeak my toleration for him; she followed his words with a sad smile, and at the same time she looked at him with the same sort of admiration which one bestows on a little



child, whose pretty prattle is senseless to listen to, but very sweet to hear. I, however, looked at him angrily. I felt a most intolerable sorrow in my heart.

"But," I asked, "are you quite certain that your father will forgive you?"

"Of course he will; what else can he do? He'll curse me at first, I know; naturally, he is a severe man. He may appeal to law to assert his parental authority; but that won't last, he loves me too well. He'll be very angry at first, and then forgive us; then everybody will be reconciled one to another, and we shall all be happy; and her father will be kind to her again, too."

"And what if he doesn't forgive you? Have you thought of that?"

"But he *will*; it's as certain as can be, but perhaps not quite so soon as one would like. I'll show him that I have character. He has only to tell me that I have none—that I'm nothing but an idle loafer, and he shall see whether I am or not. That sort of thing is no joke; when one is married one is not a little boy any more. I shall tell him that I want to be as other fellows are—like other married men. I shall live by my own work. Natásha says that's better than being supported by other people, as fellows like myself usually are. You should just hear all the jolly things she tells me—things that I never had any idea of before; I wasn't brought up to think like that. I know well enough that I am an empty-headed 'masher,' incapable of doing anything decently; but two or three days ago I had a grand idea. Although this is not the most suitable moment perhaps, I will tell you what it was; Natásha ought to know it too, of course; and you can give me your advice about it. Here's the secret: I want to write novels for the papers, just as you do. You'll introduce me to the publishers and people, won't you? I rely on you, you know. Last night I was thinking out a novel, and I think it may turn out a very pretty little work. I borrowed the plot from a comedy of Scribe's; but I'll tell you all about it another time. The principal thing is that it brings one in a good bit of money; they *do* pay you for your writings, don't they?"

I could not help bursting out laughing.

"You laugh," he said, and he laughed himself; "but you must not think I am just what I seem to be." He said this with the most inconceivable simplicity of expression. I assure

you I have a considerable gift of observation. You'll see it yourself. So why shouldn't I try? Who knows?—perhaps—and yet may be you are right; I may not have seen *real* life, so Natásha and other people tell me; what sort of an author then would I make? Laugh away, laugh away, and put me right! Do it for *her* sake; for I know you love her! To tell you the truth, I am very far from worthy of her; I feel it, and it weighs on me. I can't understand how I managed to inspire so much love as she has for me. I believe I would give my life for her. Up to the present I have had no fear whatever for the consequences of what we are doing; but just now I feel afraid. What are we doing? Good heavens! is it possible that a man, devoted entirely to his duty, and determined to do it, should lack the firmness and knowledge of the world necessary to perform that duty? Come to our aid, you, our only friend! As for me, I know nothing about anything. Forgive me counting on you like this; I know you have a noble heart, and that you are a far better fellow than myself, but you may rest assured that I intend to become worthy of both you and her."

He pressed my hand again; his face wore a look which conveyed an idea of the grandest and loftiest sentiments; he gave me his hand with such absolute confidence; he was so sure of my friendship.

"She'll help me to get better," he went on. "Don't form too bad an opinion of us, and don't be down-hearted about us. I am full of hope; and, as far as substantial cares go, we are as safe as possible. If, for instance, my idea of a novel does not work itself out, I can always give music lessons. I am not in the least bit ashamed of living by the sweat of my brow. I have quite modern ideas on this point; besides that, I have quantities of nicknacks that I can sell, and we can live on the proceeds for goodness knows how long. Then, if we can't do anything else for a living, I can go into a Government office; my father has worried me to do it often, and would be delighted if I did. I have always told him that I was too delicate to work, up to now. When he sees that my marriage has improved me, and that I have turned more serious and settled, and that I have gone into the State harness, he will be delighted, and will forgive us at once."

"But have you given a thought to what has taken place between your father and hers lately? Have you reflected on

what is going on this evening at her parents' house?" I added, pointing to Natásha, who was pale as death to hear what I said; but I was pitiless.

"You are right," he said, "it is dreadful to think of—I have thought of it all; I am quite heart-broken about it. But what's to be done? If only they would forgive us! I love them so much, you know; they have been real parents to me, and this is how I am repaying them. Oh, these quarrels! this lawsuit! and what is it all about? We love each other, and yet we must needs fight. If they would only be reconciled to one another! They really ought to, and then all these troubles would be at an end. Your words have a strange effect on me. Natásha, we really are doing a dreadful thing, you know. I told her so before. But it was you who insisted on doing it, Natásha. Look here, Vánia, don't you think it may all turn out for the best? Of course, the old people, our parents, must be reconciled some day; and why should it not be we who reconcile them? They will never be able to resist our love. You would never believe what a kind heart my father has sometimes. If you only knew how tenderly he spoke to me this morning, and how hard he tried to persuade me! And now I turn against him like this, and all because of certain miserable misunderstandings! It is such *folly*; he would only need to look at her, and to be with her half an hour, and he would give his consent to anything she liked," he added, gazing at Natásha with a look full of tenderness and passion.

"I have told him a thousand times," he continued, beginning another rigmarole, "how he will love her as soon as he sees her, and how she will astonish them all. Not one of them has ever seen a girl like her. My father thinks of her as a dreadful little intriguer. Now, my first duty is to justify her in his judgment; and I shall do it too! Oh, Natásha," he cried triumphantly, "all the world shall love you; yes, all the world. How could anyone know you and not love you? What more do we need to make us happy? This day will, I am sure of it, bring peace, happiness, and reconciliation to all of us. God bless this day! Don't you agree with me, Natásha; but what on earth is the matter?"

She seemed to be insensible, plunged into a sort of reverie, from which Aleósha's sudden question aroused her. She looked all around her, and then threw herself into my arms;

next she took a letter out of her pocket and handed it to me quickly, and as if she did not wish Aleósha to see. It was a letter for her parents—she had written it the night before—and she gave it to me with an expression of despair on her face, which I can never forget. Her terrible anguish communicated itself to me, too; for I felt that she only *now* realised to the full the dreadful wickedness of her conduct. She wished to say something, and even tried to speak, but her strength failed her, and I only just had time to support her when she fainted away. Aleósha was terribly frightened; he rubbed her temples and kissed her hands—in a few moments she regained consciousness. Aleósha's cab was standing a little way off. He signalled it up. When we had put her in she seized my hand and deluged it with burning tears . . . the carriage drove off.

I stood fixed to the spot for a long while; all my happiness seemed gone for ever, engulfed in the past; my life was blasted! I went back slowly by the road we came, to call on her poor old parents. I did not know, I never knew, how I got there, or what I told them; my thoughts were numbed, my limbs seemed to quake and give way beneath me.

There ends the history of my happiness, and the story of my love!

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## CHAPTER X.

**F**IVE days after the death of Smith, I was installed in his lodging. It was a day of misery for me; the weather was cold, and a mixture of snow and rain fell the whole day; only in the evening the sun shone for a minute or two, and a tiny ray which had lost its way came and looked into my room, out of pure curiosity, no doubt. I had already begun to regret having taken this lodging; the room was a large one, but so low and so smoky, and so stuffy and confined was the atmosphere, and it looked so horribly empty withal, in spite of my bits of furniture, that I was quite out of conceit with it.

I passed the morning putting my papers in order, which papers I had brought over in a pillow-case because I had no portfolio. After arranging them I began to write, but my pen

remained still, between my fingers—for my head was full of other things. I threw my pen down and went to the window; it was beginning to get dark, and my sorrows seemed to be on the increase. Disagreeable and painful thoughts kept assailing me; I felt that I should end by breaking down in this huge city. Spring was coming near; oh, I thought, if only I could *get out* of my shell, here, and make my way somewhere and smell the fresh air of the fields and woods, which I have not seen for so long, I believe I might live again.

How glorious it would be, I thought, if by enchantment, or by some miracle, I could suddenly and entirely forget all I have gone through during the past few years, and with free and new life-power begin all over again. If I could, I thought at last, I would go into a lunatic-asylum, and get my brain thoroughly cured and recast in a new way. I had a consuming thirst to live, and to believe in life. Here, in the middle of my meditations, I burst out laughing. What shall I do, I thought, after I leave the lunatic-asylum? Shall I set to and write some more novels? . . . I went on dreaming and bothering my head, and at last night came. I had promised Natasha to go and see her this evening, she had begged me specially to come, by letter. I raised myself and prepared to go out, for I felt that I must get away from this wretched room somehow or other.

In proportion to the darkness that fell upon the room, the latter seemed to grow vaster and vaster. I had the idea that I should see Smith every night—he would be here, sitting immovable and staring at me, as he used to stare at the confectioner's, and Azor would come, too, and lie at his feet. I was in the midst of these fancies when something happened which made a great impression on me.

I must admit, frankly, that whether it was my nerves were out of order, or whether the thing was caused by the impressions to which this new lodging gave rise, or whether it was the spleen which had been worrying me for some time past, however it was, I had begun to fall gradually into that state of mind in which I often find myself just now (while I am lying ill, here, at the hospital)—a state of mind which might be described as mystical nervousness. It is a form of terror, the most grievous of all perhaps, but of a kind which I cannot describe, which I cannot quite recall when not present, which does not even exist under ordinary circumstances, but which

may come on at any moment like a standing irony against all the arguments of reason. This form of terror arrays itself before me as an incontestable fact, hideous and inexorable ; it develops more and more in the very teeth of all the testimony which cool judgment brings to bear against it ; so that at last the spirit, although it very likely will gain in keenness of vision at these moments, nevertheless loses all power to resist the sensations described.

I was standing before the table, turning my back to the door, and was just going to get my hat, when the impression came over me suddenly, that the moment I turned round again I should see Smith ; he would open the door noiselessly ; would stop at the entrance and look round the room ; and then quietly, and with his old head bent low, he would come and post himself before me, and focus me with his vacant eyes ; and would suddenly laugh a long laugh, in my very face, shaking his old body for a considerable time. The picture painted itself in my imagination with the most extraordinary vividness, while at the same time there came over me a feeling of absolute certainty that all this was really happening behind me, and that if I did not see it, it was simply because my back was turned, while the door seemed to have been opened. When I turned round a moment after, the door *was* just opening, noiselessly and slowly—exactly as I had imagined it ; I gave a cry, and for an instant or two nothing was to be seen ; it was just as if the door had opened of itself ; then, all of a sudden, an extraordinary creature appeared at the threshold, and I caught sight of a pair of eyes which, so far as I could distinguish in the dusk, were staring at me, fixed and motionless. An icy chill pervaded my limbs ; I distinguished with terror that it was the figure of a child—a little girl ; and if it had been Smith himself appearing to me, the apparition would not have startled me so much as this sudden and unexpected apparition of an unknown child in my room at such an hour of the night. She opened the door slowly and quietly, as though she was afraid to come in. She stopped at the threshold and stared at me as though stupefied, then she took a couple of steps towards me and stood in front of me, without having said a word as yet.

I observed her more closely ; she was a little girl of twelve or thirteen, thin and very pale, just as though she had lately recovered from some illness ; her large black eyes shone, too, with the sort of light that illness gives. With her left hand she

held the end of an old torn kerchief which covered her bosom, and she was trembling with the cold which prevailed out of doors. Her clothes were nothing but tatters; her black hair was neglected and dishevelled.

We stood and stared at each other for some minutes.

"Where is grandpapa?" she asked at length. Her voice was hoarse and weak, just as though her chest and throat were affected.

My "mystical nervousness" vanished with her question. Smith was being asked for; here were traces of him turning up in this most unexpected fashion.

"Your grandpapa?" I answered, rather abruptly,— "but he's dead!" I had answered without reflection, and was sorry for it immediately afterwards. She stood nearly a minute in the same position that she was in before, and then suddenly began to tremble to such an extent that I thought she was going to have a nervous attack; I hastened to support her, for fear she should fall. She seemed to feel better in a few moments, and I could see that she was making superhuman efforts to master her emotion.

"Forgive me, forgive me, little one; forgive me, my child! I told you too suddenly, perhaps it was not your grandpapa after all. Poor little woman; tell me whom you are looking for. Is it the old man who used to live here?"

"Yes," she murmured, with difficulty, and looking at me anxiously.

"Was his name Smith?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm afraid it was indeed your grandpapa; yes, he is dead; but you mustn't cry, little one! Tell me, why didn't you come sooner? Where have you come from now? He was buried yesterday—he died quite suddenly. Are you his grand-daughter?"

She did not answer my rapid, incoherent questions; but went back softly to the door, and glided out without a word. I was so astonished that I did nothing to retain her; but she stopped a moment on the threshold, and, turning half towards me and half away, she asked—

"Is Azorka dead too?"

"Yes, he's dead too," I said, surprised at the unexpected question. It seemed as though she supposed that the old dog *must*, of necessity, have died at the same time as his master.

Then she went out, and closed the door behind her.

A moment after I darted out in pursuit, very angry with myself for allowing her to go. She had glided away so quietly that I had not heard the door open—the outer door leading to the main staircase.

“She has not had time to get down yet,” I thought, and I stood and listened on the landing. But all was silence, there was no sound of any kind to be heard; the door of a lodging lower down was closed, and again silence prevailed.

I ran down; the stair from my lodging down to the fourth story was a winding one, but thence to the bottom it was straight; it was a dirty, dark, sombre, old staircase, one of those old-fashioned ones that one finds frequently in those large St. Petersburg houses which are divided into numerous small lodgings. At this time of the day, or night, the most absolute darkness prevailed; I ran down to the fourth story, and then it struck me that somebody was there, close to me on the landing, hiding. I groped about looking for her, and sure enough there she was, with her little face hidden up against the wall, crying quietly.

“Why are you frightened?” I asked her. “I’m afraid I startled you; it was wrong of me. Your grandpapa spoke of you when he was dying, his last words were about you. There are two books here, his no doubt. What is your name? Where do you live? He said you lived in the Sixth Line—”

But I never finished my sentence. She gave a sudden cry, evidently drawn from her by the idea that I knew where she lived; gave me a push back with her thin white hand, and rushed downstairs. I followed her. I heard the sound of her flying steps, it ceased suddenly, and when I reached the bottom she was gone. I went to the end of our street after her, but all in vain. “She’ll be hiding somewhere on the stairs,” I said to myself.

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## CHAPTER XI.

**S**UDDENLY I brushed up against someone who was passing; he was walking quickly with his head bent down, and was plunged in thought. My astonishment was



great when I recognised Ikménief. This was evidently an evening of unexpected encounters for me. Ikménief had been taken ill three days before, seriously ill, and suddenly I meet him in the street in this detestable weather; and he a man, too, who never, or scarcely ever, went out of an evening, and who had become still more of a stay-at-home since Natásha went away. He seemed like a man tired of his own company, who had gone out on purpose to exchange ideas with a friend, and appeared to be more than usually pleased to see me. He took my hand and pressed it warmly, and then drew me with him in the direction he was taking, and did not even ask me which way I was going.

He had a hurried, impetuous air. "Where could he have been going to?" I thought. It was quite useless, worse than useless, to ask him, because he had grown so irritable of late, and so apt to see offensive allusion or insult in the most ordinary questions or remarks addressed to him.

I looked at him stealthily. He had grown very thin, he was unshaven, and there was a sickly look on his face; his hair, which had become quite grey, escaped from under his worn hat, and hung down over the collar of his old overcoat in long wisps.

I have already described the old man's liability to fits of absence of mind. He would sometimes forget that he was alone in the room, and would begin talking and gesticulating with his hands. It was a painful sort of thing to witness.

"Where were you off to?" he asked. "I was just out on business," he continued. "And how are you getting on; better?"

"Surely I ought to ask after *your* health," I said. "You were quite ill a day or two ago, and here you are up and out."

He did not reply, and did not even appear to have heard what I said.

"How is Anna Andréevna?" I asked.

"She's all right, she's all right, though she *is* a little indisposed, too. She is so *down*, altogether low. She has often spoken about you, and wants to know why you never come to see us. Perhaps you are on your way to our house now?" No? I am keeping you, perhaps. Am I taking you out of your way?" He said all this looking at me distrustfully.

I hastened to assure him that I was just on my way to pay Anna Andréevna a visit, although I felt that this would make it too late for me to go and see Natásha.

"That's all right, that's very nice," he said, evidently tranquillised by my answer; after which he was silent, and walked pensively on.

"Yes, that's very nice," he repeated mechanically a few minutes later, as though waking up from a deep reverie. "Vánia, dear boy," he went on, "you have always been like a son to us. God did not give us a son, but he sent you instead. I have always felt that, and so has my old wife; and you have always been so respectful and gentle towards us both, just like a good, dutiful son. God bless you for it, dear Vánia. May He bless you and love you as we two old folks do." His voice trembled as he spoke; then he was silent for a minute.

"Have you been ill, Vánia?" he went on. "Why have you been so long without coming to see us?"

I told him the story of old Smith, and explained that all this had prevented my coming. I added that I had been very near having a serious illness, and that all the bustle I had been in had made it impossible for me to get to Vassili Ostrof (where he lived). I very nearly let out that I had been to see Natásha, in spite of all the illness and bustle which I had put forward by way of excuse a moment ago; but, luckily, I stopped myself in time.

The story of Smith interested him very much. He followed my narrative with keen attention. When he heard that my new lodging was damp—a worse lodging even than my last one, and that I paid six roubles a month for it, he flared up. He had become so irritable and impatient, his wife was the only person who could calm him in moments of anger, and *she* did not always succeed of late.

"There, it's that literature of yours," he cried, with warmth. "It's brought you to the garret, and it will take you to the graveyard. I told you it would, I predicted it! What is B——— doing, reviewing as usual?"

"Dead of phthisis. I thought I had told you some time ago!"

"He's dead, is he? Dead! of course, so it was sure to be! Has he left anything for his widow and children to live on? I think you said he was married. Why do these sort of people marry?"

"He did not leave a farthing," I said.

"There you are!" he cried, with so much irritation and excitement that we might have been discussing a near relation of his, or his own brother.

"You see, Vánia, I told you it would end like this. Not left a farthing! It's easy enough to say that! Well, and his fame! He may have gained undying fame, but that won't satisfy their stomachs. And you, too, Vánia, dear boy, I told you how it would be. I praised you up, I know; but I felt all along how it would be. So he's dead! And why shouldn't one die, after all. Life is very lovely, isn't it? this mortal habitation is so very delightful! Look there!"

And, with an involuntary, abrupt gesture of the hand, he drew attention to the foggy street, badly lighted with lamps which were quite lost in the damp mist; the dirty houses; the wet stones of the pavement, shining in the lamplight; the miserable looking passers by, sullen and drenched with the rain; the whole picture consistently crowned with the sombre St. Petersburg sky, that looked as though it had sucked itself full of Indian ink.

We reached the open square. Before us towered, in the darkness, the statue of the Emperor Nicholas, lighted up from behind by jets of gas; and further on, in the rear of the statue, rose the immense mass of the St. Isaac's Cathedral, which seemed to be shapeless, except where it gained a vague outline against the dark background of the sky.

"You told me, Vánia, that he was a good, generous, sympathetic, sensible, kind-hearted man. Now, let me tell you, all your sympathetic, kind-hearted fellows are like this; all that they do is to multiply orphans—that's what it is. Bah! one ought to be content to die; eh? so one ought. Anything to get out of this. Go anywhere, even to Siberia; it couldn't be worse. What do you want, little one?" he asked suddenly, seeing a little child on the pavement begging.

She was a child, of seven or eight years old at most, dressed in tatters; her little stockingless feet were encased in old, torn slippers, and she tried hard to cover her poor little shivering body with the semblance of an old dress, quite shapeless, and evidently grown out of long ago. Her thin face, pale and sickly-looking, was turned towards us, and she was looking at us silently and anxiously, while she held out her little trembling hand, afraid of, and yet evidently resigned to, a refusal of the alms she sought.

The old man, on seeing her, was seized with such a fit of trembling, and turned round so quickly towards her, that he frightened her. She shivered, and moved a step further from him.

“Don't be afraid, little one,” he said. “You want alms, do you? Wait a minute, then. Here!”

And, trembling with emotion, he felt about in his pockets, and brought out two or three pieces of money; however, when he had given it, it seemed too little to him, I suppose, for he pulled out his purse and gave her a rouble-note, which was all there was in it.

“May the Lord Jesus guard you, little one, and God's angels protect you!” and with his trembling old hand he made the sign of the cross several times over the little beggar-maid; but suddenly, observing that I was there, and that I was looking at him, he frowned, and went on, with long strides, down the street.

“Look you, Vánia,” he said at last, after an angry pause, “I can't bear to see innocent little things like that starving in the streets, through the fault of their cursed fathers and mothers. And yet I don't believe any mother would send a little child like that on such a miserable errand, unless she were herself hopelessly wretched; probably, she has several more little orphans stowed away in some corner. This one is the eldest, no doubt; she herself—the old mother—is ill; and, well, they are not children of a prince, you see. There are lots of children in the world, Vánia, who are not prince's brats.”

He was silent for a few moments.

“You see, Vánia,” he said, evidently rather embarrassed and confused, “you see I have promised my wife—or, I should say, we have decided, she and I—to adopt a little orphan girl, the first that happens to come across us; she must be poor, of course, and quite young. We are so dull, we two old people, living all alone like this; but she has begun, now, to put difficulties in the way. Do talk to her about it, Vánia. Pretend it's your own idea, and that I had nothing to do with it. Reason with her, you understand. I've long wanted to ask you to do this for me, it's so painful for me to do it myself, and why should I, after all? What have I got to do with little orphan children? I have no need of any children; it would only be for the sake of hearing a child's voice now and then, and just for the old wife, to distract her a little. But we shall never get home at this rate; let's take a droshky; she's probably waiting impatiently.”

It was half-past seven when we arrived.

## CHAPTER XII.

THE Ikméniefs were very fond of each other ; long-existing custom had bound the old couple very close to one another. This fact, however, did not prevent the old gentleman from being, at times, slightly undemonstrative in his manner towards his wife, amounting occasionally almost to rudeness. Some delicate, sensitive natures are full of a fine reserve, which prevents their giving scope to the feelings which they entertain towards those they love—not only in public, but also, and perhaps even more so, in private. Such was old Ikménief in relation to his wife ; he esteemed and loved her, although she had not a single merit excepting that of being *good*, and although she knew nothing whatever, excepting how to love him, and although her love for him was sometimes, out of pure simplicity, a little too demonstrative.

Their affection for each other had increased since Natásha's departure. The feeling that they were quite alone now weighed on them, and, in spite of moments when the old man was morose and low-spirited, they did not like leaving each other, and could not do so even for a few hours without pain and grief.

They seemed to have made a tacit agreement never to mention their daughter. The old mother did not dare even allude to her in the presence of her husband, although this reticence was most painful to herself. She had long since forgiven Natásha ; and we had a sort of private convention that at each visit I should give her some news about her dear daughter, who was always present to her thoughts. She became ill if I kept her without news for any time ; and when I brought her news, she interested herself in worrying every little detail out of me—questioning me in a feverish, excited manner. My report always soothed her. She nearly died of fright one day when Natásha fell ill, and was as near as possible going to see her.

There were days when she was wretchedly low, would weep, and call her daughter even ; affectionate name she could think of, and would talk bitterly of her old husband. Then she would speak of cruelty and hardness of heart, in his presence, and even went so far as to hint that God would never pardon

those who could not themselves forgive others. Nearer than this to a direct allusion, she never dared go.

At such moments the old man used to become sad and depressed. He frowned and said nothing, or else changed the subject, or at other times he got up and left us, and went to his own room, so that the old lady was at liberty to ease her sorrow in tears and lamentations. He used to leave us alone together whenever I came; indeed, he hardly gave himself time to greet me before he was out of the room, so that I might be able to plunge straight into my story of Natásha and her doings for his old wife's benefit. He did the same this evening, as usual.

"I am soaked," he said, the moment we got in, "I must go to my room for a short while; sit down Vánia. He'll tell you all about something that happened in connection with his new lodging," he added to his wife. "I'll be back in a few minutes."

He left the room precipitately, with a sort of false shame to have allowed us to be in confidential communication about Natásha, and evidently feeling put out by his own want of firmness, and by his condescension.

"That's what he always does," said poor Anna Andréevna, "and he knows quite well, the whole time, that we see through it. Why should he dissemble with us so? I am not a stranger to him. And my Natásha—he might forgive her, perhaps he would like to forgive her. God alone can read his thoughts. I hear him crying at night, and yet when he is not alone he is marble; pride seems to get the entire mastery over him. Tell me now, quick, where was he coming from?"

"I was just going to ask you the same question."

"I was alarmed when I saw him go out on such an evening. He must have something very important—and yet, what *could* he have to do? I am afraid, I daren't ask him. I live in perpetual day-dreams for her and him. I say to myself, perhaps he has gone to see her; perhaps he has resolved to pardon her. He knows everything about her; even the latest details. How does he get his knowledge? I cannot make it out. Yesterday and to-day he has been worrying himself about something. You don't speak. Has anything happened yet down there? I have been waiting for you, as for the Messiah. Tell me now, does that scoundrel intend to abandon Natásha?"

I told her all I knew with the frankness which I always assumed for her; I told her that there *was* something stirring

which looked rather like a rupture, and that there had been some rather more serious differences of opinion than heretofore, and that Natásha had written, begging me to see her on this particular evening, so that, I added, I should not have come to see her (Madame Ikménief) to-night, but that her husband dragged me in.

I explained to her that the situation had grown very critical. The prince had returned from a trip abroad and had taken his son seriously in hand, and the latter now seemed to have less aversion to his wife-designate, it was even said that he was beginning to fall in love with her. Natásha had written in a state of extreme agitation; she had told me that this evening would decide everything. What did that mean? I had no idea; but anyhow I must make a point of being with her at the hour appointed, and there was no time to lose.

“Go, go, by all means, dear Vánia. Yes, you must go undoubtedly; but take a cup of tea before he comes back, I wish they'd bring in the hot water. Matreona! let us have the teapurn, quick. What a slow-coach the girl is! So that's settled: you'll just take a cup of tea, and then make some excuse to him, and go; and come early to-morrow and tell me all about it. Gracious heaven! if any new misfortune has happened to my darling! My husband knows every little detail that goes on; I am sure of it. To-day he is in a bad humour; he has been cross with me and scolded me. After dinner he went into his room to rest, nominally; but I saw him, through the key-hole, praying on his knees before the ikon.\* After tea, instead of having his nap, as usual, he took his hat and went out. I did not dare ask him where he was going to, he would have begun scolding at me; he often does scold now-a-days—sometimes he flies out at Matreona, and sometimes at me. When he begins to shout at me I always feel my limbs quake beneath me, and my heart seems to feel as though it were being torn out by the roots. Could you let me see what Natásha writes?”

I showed her the note. The poor old thing had a conviction, which she cherished secretly deep down in her heart. It was that Aleósha—whom she never failed to refer to as that scoundrel, that heartless wretch, that idiot of a boy, and so on—would finish by marrying Natásha, and that the old prince would give his consent to the union.

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\* A picture of a saint, generally painted on wood, and hung in the corner of each room in a Russian house.

She had betrayed the existence of this idea before me on several occasions ; but she would not, for the world, have put the thought into words in her husband's presence. He would have cursed Natásha, I think ; and would have banished her from his heart for ever from the moment he thought such a union possible. We all recognised this : that he was ever waiting for her, that his soul longed for her ; but that he would expect her to come alone, penitent, and having torn the very memory of her lover out of her heart—these were the absolute conditions of his pardon.

"This miserable boy has no more character than heart ; I have always said so," said Anna Andréevna. "They have brought him up badly ; they've made a ne'er-do-weel of him. He is going to abandon her ; I see it. What will become of the poor darling ? and what can he have found so extraordinarily fascinating about this other girl ? It's astonishing !"

"They say she is a charming girl," I said ; "and Natásha herself says—"

"Charming ! You scribblers find every woman that comes near you *charming* ! And if Natásha really says so, it is pure nobility of soul on her part. She gives up everything to him ; and how many times has he betrayed her—the scoundrel, the heartless villain that he is ! I am simply appalled when I see the pride of some people. If only my old man would conquer this resentment ; if he would pardon her, my darling ! if he would bring her back to me, how I would kiss her, how I would gaze at the darling ! Tell me, is she very thin ?"

"She is, rather."

"Poor little victim ! Oh, Vánia, I am so unhappy ; day and night I do nothing but cry—I'll tell you all about it another time ; and a thousand times I have been on the point of begging him to forgive her, but my heart always fails me, when I reflect that he might get angry and curse her. That would be too dreadful ! God always chastises any child cursed by its parents. Constant quaking and trembling, that's what my life is ! and you, who grew up in our house, and never knew anything but kindness and caresses at our hands, how comes it that you can think her charming—this other woman ? I know the real facts of the case. A relative of our Matreona is a servant at the prince's house, and has told me all the ins and outs of the story. The prince has had intimate acquaintance with a certain countess, who has long



tried to get him to marry her ; but he has always managed to keep out of this marriage. This countess had made herself disgracefully conspicuous by her way of behaving, even during her husband's life ; and when she became a widow she went abroad. The French and Italians had to look out for themselves when she was among them. They say she had several barons hanging to her skirts over there, and that it was there she hooked the prince, Aleósha's father. The countess has a step-daughter, a child of her husband's by a former marriage ; and, while the mother wasted her share of the fortune, the step-daughter's two million roubles, which her father, a brandy monopolist, left her, went on increasing while the girl grew up.

"They say that she has three millions now, and the old prince, who is no fool, says to himself, 'She shall marry Aleósha.' He is not the sort of man to let such an opportunity escape. One of his relations, a count and a high functionary, quite agrees with him as to the expediency of the step. 'Three millions!' he says. 'It's not a thing to be sneezed at. Go to the countess, and see what she has to say.' But the countess won't hear of it, and fights hands and feet against it. She seems to be a very unprincipled woman, this countess, and a cool hand, too. She is not received in society here ; she may be received abroad, but that's quite a different thing. 'Oh, dear, no!' she says to the prince. 'You shall marry me, if you like ; but Aleósha is not going to marry my step-daughter.' As for the girl, I hear she loves this step-mother, and obeys her, too, in everything ; they say she's an angel of sweetness. 'Countess,' says the prince, 'be calm ; you have eaten up your fortune and are loaded with debt ! If Aleósha marries your step-daughter, it will be a very well-assorted match. Your daughter is an innocent little thing, and my son is a great booby ; we'll take them under our tuition and manage their affairs for them, and you shall not want cash. But as for marrying you ; what's the use of that?' The prince is as sly as a fox. For six months the countess would not consent ; but now they say that she and he have been to Warsaw together for a trip, and have come back in perfect harmony as to the matter in dispute. I have it on first-rate authority."

All this was in strict conformity with what Aleósha had told me ; swearing by all his saints that he would never marry for money. And now it seemed that the charms of this Catherine Feodorovna were seducing him ! He was quite aware, too, that

the reports of his father's intention to marry again were true enough, although the prince denied them so as not to irritate the countess just at present. Aleósha was very fond of his father, and believed in him like an oracle.

"She is not a countess, you know.—this girl whom you were pleased to tell me was so *charming*," continued the good old lady, still irritated with this word of praise which I had bestowed upon Aleósha's betrothed. "Natásha would be a much better match for him; she is of noble blood—the old nobility, and the other girl is nothing higher than the daughter of a brandy-farmer. Yesterday evening—I forgot to tell you this—my husband was rummaging among our old papers and documents; he had opened the old desk in which he keeps them. He was sitting there, very serious; I didn't dare look at him, and he noticed that I didn't say anything, which made him cross, and he called me up to him and explained all about our genealogy. Well, you must know the Ikméniefs' titles of nobility date from the reign of Ivan the Terrible, and the Shoumiloffs were known as early as the time of Alexis Michailovitch. We have all the documents in our possession, and Karamsine mentions us in his history. So you see, my dear boy, we are as good as our neighbours. I don't quite understand why he took the trouble of explaining all this to me; probably he went through it all because he felt hurt at their contempt for Natásha. They cannot crow over *us* for all that, except for their money! How this brigand of a prince runs after the money—the heartless, greedy villain that he is; everybody knows it! They say that he became a Jesuit at Warsaw, secretly; is it true?"

"All absurdity," I replied, rather struck with the remark, however. But what did strike me as very strange was that Ikménief had gone over his genealogical documents. He had never before this seemed to take any glory in his descent.

"They are all a set of villains and monsters," she went on. "Now tell me, what does my darling do with herself? Is she very dull, does she cry much? Oh, its time for you to go and see her. Matreona! Matreona! What a maid that is! Tell me, Vánia, are they ever insolent to my little one?"

What could I say? She began crying again; and I asked her what was the new misfortune she had alluded to a few minutes before.

"Ah, my dear Vânia, I am not at the end of my troubles yet," she sobbed. "I had a gold locket with the portrait of my Natásha as a little child; she was eight years old then, the little darling! A wandering artist did it; he was a good portrait painter; he represented her as Love, with pretty shiny hair, all curly, and a little muslin chemise on, which showed her dear little figure through. She was so pretty—so pretty that one could never look enough at her. I wanted him to put a pair of little wings on to the picture of her, but he wouldn't. Well, dear, after all these troubles which we have had, I took this locket out of the case and wore it on my neck, with my cross, and I was dreadfully afraid that my husband would see it, for you know he has thrown away or burnt everything of hers that remained behind. I could at least look at her portrait, and cry over it, and that was a comfort to me. When I was alone I used to talk to it. I used to bless it at night, before sleeping. I asked it questions, and it seemed to answer me. I was so glad that he knew nothing about it; and then, yesterday morning, the locket was gone! My heart froze when I saw that it was no longer there. I searched, and searched, and searched—lost, completely lost! Where could it have gone to? I've looked everywhere; someone must have found it, but who could have found it, unless Matreona or *he*? And it was not Matreona. She would have given it back to me. She is devoted to me, soul and body. Matreona! do bring that tea-urn.

"Then I said to myself, 'If *he* has found it, what will become of it?' And I sat and moped and cried here, and could not stop my tears anyhow. As for him, he was kind and caressing, and he looked at me sadly, as though he knew well enough what I was crying about, and as though he was sorry for me. It was he who found the locket, and he has destroyed it; he is quite capable of doing so when he is angry, and now he is sorry that he did it. I cried all night about my locket. I'm sure this portends some new calamity. The fact is, I do nothing *but* weep; and I have been waiting and longing to see you, dear, good Vânia, as though you were an angel of God come to comfort my poor old heart."

She sobbed, and went on: "I wanted to ask you something more. Did he tell you that he wanted to adopt a little girl?"

"Yes, he did speak about it. He said that you and he had decided upon it."

“I don't dream of any such thing, my dear boy; it would only remind me of our grief. Unless I can have my Natásha, I want nobody. I have only had one daughter, and I will not have another. Where did he get such an idea from? Perhaps he thinks that it would console me, because he sees that I cry a good deal; or, does he want to banish the memory of his daughter utterly from his heart, by attaching himself to another child? Did he talk to you about me? Was he cross and moody? Hush! here he comes. You can tell me another time; and above all don't forget to come to-morrow.”

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### CHAPTER XIII.

**I**KMÉNIEF came in. He scrutinised us closely as he sat down.

“And the tea-urn,” he asked. “Why haven't they brought it?”

“It's just coming, just coming, dear,” Anna Andréevna hastened to reply.

Matreona no sooner saw Ikménief than she appeared with the tea-urn, just as though she had waited for him before she would bring it. She was an old servant, tried and devoted, but he most inveterate old grumbler in the world.

“H'm! it's not very pleasant to come in soaked; and some people don't *wish* to get one's tea ready for one,” growled the old man.

His wife looked at me significantly. Ikménief hated this sort of private eye-signalling; and, although he pretended not to be noticing, his expression showed that he had observed the look she gave me.

“I was out on business, Vánia,” he said, quite suddenly. “It's a shameful thing; I am losing my case all down the line. I have got no proofs, you see; I ought to have some papers which I can't get hold of. The enquiry was made unjustly, and in a partial way. Ah!”

He was talking about the lawsuit. Not knowing what to say, I held my peace, while he stared at me defiantly.

“Bah!” he cried suddenly, as though irritated by our silence, “the sooner the better! They can condemn me as much as they like, but they can't make me a dishonest man. My conscience is on my side. Let them condemn me as much as they like. At least, it will be the end of it. When they have ruined me, they will leave me in peace. I shall let everything go, and move to Siberia.”

“Good heavens! *Where* does he want to go to; why so far off?” the old lady could not help crying.

“What do we gain by being nearer here?” he replied rudely, and as if he thought that he had been given his cue.

“Well, there are people—” Anna Andréevna began, looking at me very anxiously.

“What sort of people?” cried the old man, looking at us angrily, one after the other, “thieves, calumniators, and Judases? There are plenty of them everywhere, you needn't be afraid. However, if you don't wish to go with me, you can stay. I don't force you to go.”

“But, Nicholas, my dear,” said the poor old woman, “why *should* I stay without you; you know that I haven't a soul besides you in the world.” She became much confused, and looked at me entreatingly, as though begging for help; but the old man was irritated, anything and everything angered him just now; there was no use in saying anything to *him*.

“Calm yourself, Anna Andréevna,” I said. “It's not half so bad in Siberia as people think. Should any misfortune overtake you, so that you are obliged to sell your property, Nicholas Sergéevitch's idea is a capital one. He would easily find a good place in Siberia, and—”

“There, that's what I call sense! That's just as I think. I shall leave everything and be off!”

“Well, I never expected that of you,” cried poor Anna Andréevna, clasping her hands in despair. “Nor of you, Vánia, either; you have never had anything but kindness from us, and now you—”

“Well, and what else are we to do? What are we to live on here? Think of that a little! Our money is all spent, we are at our last copecks! Perhaps you would advise me to go to the prince, Peter Alexandrovitch, and beg his pardon.”

On hearing the prince's name the good old lady began to tremble with fear, her spoon slipped out of her hand and fell into the saucer with a loud clatter.

"That's a very good idea," continued Ikménief, hugging himself with a mischievous joy. "What do you think, Vánia? Don't you think I'd better go to him? Why should I set out for Siberia? I must get myself nicely dressed to-morrow, and trimmed and curled; Anna Andréevna shall find a clean shirt for me—one wants that to pay a visit to such a great man. I'll buy a pair of gloves, so as to be in the most correct fashion, and I'll go thus into the presence of his high mightiness. 'My lord,' I'll say, 'your excellency! my benefactor, my father! pardon and pity! Give me a bit of bread! I have a wife and children—small children!'

"Is that the way to do it, Anna Andréevna? Is that what you wish me to do?"

"I don't wish anything of the sort, my dear. All I did was to speak—foolishly, without thinking; that's all. Forgive me if I pained you; but don't scold me, dear," she said, piteously.

I am certain that his heart was rent at sight of the tears and alarm of his poor old wife, and that he suffered as much as, and perhaps more than she did; but he was beside himself. One often sees this in kind and nervous natures. In spite of all their kindness of heart, they allow themselves, sometimes, to be carried away so far as to find enjoyment in their moments of affliction and anger, which *will* out at all costs, even in giving offence to some perfectly innocent being, and especially to those nearest and dearest to them.

Women very often feel the need of imagining themselves miserable or offended, when neither misery nor offence exists. Many men resemble women in this peculiarity, and men who are decidedly *not* of weak character. Old Ikménief felt the need of quarrelling, although he himself suffered in hatching the quarrel.

The idea struck me at this moment, that he might really have made some sort of attempt of the nature suspected by Anna Andréevna. Perhaps God had put a good thought into his head, and he had set out to go and see Natásha, but had changed his mind on the way, or something or other had diverted him from his purpose; and he returned home irritated, wounded, ashamed of his late sentiment, and looking about for someone on whom he might vent the anger which his own weakness had aroused, and choosing precisely that person who, he suspected, held the same views.

Perhaps, when desiring to forgive his daughter, he had pictured to himself very accurately the ecstasy of joy into which his forgiveness of Natásha would throw the poor old mother; and therefore, in face of a check, she was naturally the first to suffer by it.

However, he was touched just now to see her trembling there before him, and frightened at his violence. He was ashamed of his anger, and for an instant he restrained himself. We were all silent. I avoided catching his eye. But the peace was a very short one. The storm had to burst. An explosion of some kind was absolutely necessary. Perhaps it would be a curse.

"Look here," he said to me, suddenly; "I would rather not have done it, and I am sorry to be obliged to do it; but the time is come when I must explain myself openly—without any beating about the bush—as every honest man should, you understand. I am very glad you are here, because I am going to say out loud, and in your presence, so that *others* may hear and take a note of it, that all this nonsense, this crying, and these sighings and lamentations, are beginning to pall upon me. What I tore out of my heart, lacerating myself and bleeding to death, almost, in the process, will never have place there again. What I have said, I will do. I am talking of what happened six months ago, you understand; and I do so thus plainly so that you should have no excuse for misunderstanding the sense of my words."

He said this turning his bloodshot eyes on me and avoiding the looks of his frightened wife.

"I want to have no more of these absurdities. What makes me wild is that some people take me for a fool and a coward, and attribute to me weakness and baseness which are not in my nature; the fact is, they think I am mad with grief. It's *absurd*. I have uprooted all my old sentiments out of my heart. I have forgotten them. The memory of them does not exist, so far as I am concerned. It's gone, gone; I have forgotten it."

He rose up and banged his fist on the table.

"Oh, Nicholas Sergéevitch, do have some pity on Anna Andréevna," I cried indignantly. "See what a state you have brought her to," but it was pouring oil on to the fire.

"Pity!" he cried trembling with rage, "has she any for me? No, no! No pity when plots are being hatched at my own

fireside against me, and in favour of a depraved daughter, who deserves every kind of punishment and curse that can be inflicted upon her."

"Oh, Nicholas, dear Nicholas, don't curse her! anything, anything but that; don't curse your daughter, Nicholas!" cried the poor mother.

"I do curse her," repeated the old man speaking louder and louder, "I curse her, because I, I who am the sinned against, the offended, the outraged, am expected to go and ask pardon of this cursed girl. Oh, yes, that's what it amounts to! That's what I am tormented to do day and night in my own house, by these cryings and moanings and lamentations and silly allusions. It is thought to soften my heart in that way, and to make me pitiful. Look here, Vánia, look here!" he went on, dragging out of his pocket, hurriedly and with trembling fingers, a bundle of papers, "these are the copies of my lawsuit papers, the result of them is that I am a swindler and a thief, and that I robbed my benefactor. I am dishonoured, I am disgraced, and all because of *her*; wait, look here, look!" and he threw the papers about over the table.

In his frenzy he seized everything that there was to seize in his pocket, and suddenly something noisy and heavy fell on to the table. Anna Andréevna gave a cry. It was the lost locket.

I could hardly believe my eyes. The old man blushed to the roots of his hair and shook all over. His wife stood before him with hands clasped together, and a supplicating expression on her face. Her eyes wore a happy radiant look of hope. This blushing and confusion of the old man, what did it signify?

It meant that she was not mistaken in her idea that he still loved his daughter. She knew now how the locket had disappeared. She understood now that he had found it and rejoiced to find it, and, perhaps, trembling with joyous excitement had hidden it away somewhere about him, safe from all other eyes; that alone, somewhere or other, he had gazed at his beloved daughter's face, gazed and gazed very likely, and could not gaze enough! That, perhaps, he had shut himself up, as she, the poor mother, had done, and, out of hearing of every one, had talked to his dear Natásha's portrait, and invented imaginary replies; and that at night he had very likely soothed his poor old tormented and tortured heart by caressing and kissing the dear image, his breast heaving with sobs, and



that instead of curses, he had heaped forgiveness and a father's blessing on her whom he professed to loathe and to curse before others.

"My dear old husband," cried Anna Andréevna, "so you do love her still!" she could not contain herself any longer, although he had cursed Natásha in his fury a moment before.

But no sooner did he hear her words than a wild rage lit up his eyes. He caught up the locket, threw it violently to the ground, and stamped on it with his foot.

"I curse you, I curse you," he cried hoarsely, "for ever, yes, for ever!"

"Her, her! my Natásha, my darling girl!" shrieked the old woman, "her little face—he is crushing it underfoot, underfoot, the tyrant! Unfeeling monster! Demon of pride that you are!"

Ikménief no sooner heard his wife's cry than he paused; he was sorry for what he had done. Catching up the locket, he rushed out of the room, but, before he had taken two steps, he fell on his knees, and seizing the arm of a sofa which stood near him, bowed his old head upon it, as if his strength were utterly spent.

He sobbed like a child, like a woman; his sobs tightened his breast to suffocation, as though they would burst his heart strings. The apparently hard-hearted old man had suddenly become weaker than any child. Ah me! he didn't look like cursing now! He was not ashamed of showing his affection for his daughter before us now; and, in a sudden transport of love, he covered the little portrait-face with countless kisses, the portrait which, but a moment before, he had trampled beneath his feet. All the tenderness, all the love which he felt for his daughter, so long kept under, had now burst forth with irresistible strength, and the violence of the transport had quite overcome him.

"Forgive her, forgive her!" cried the old mother, sobbing—she had bent over him, and was embracing him,—“oh! forgive her, and bring her back to her own home; and God, in His dreadful judgment day, will remember your mercy and forgiveness.”

"No! no! never, I *never* will," he said, in a hoarse, broken voice, "never, never!"

## CHAPTER XIV.

I GOT to Natásha's rather late—ten o'clock. She was living then on the Fontánka, by the Seménofski Bridge, in a large, dirty-looking house, belonging to one Kolutushkino, on the fourth storey. When she first left her home, she and Aleósha had occupied a very nice set of apartments, not very large, but prettily furnished and very conveniently situated, on the third storey of a house, on the Litéynaya; but the resources of the young prince very soon failed.

He did not become a music-master, but he began to borrow money, and ran heavily into debt, comparatively speaking; he wanted money to decorate the rooms, and for presents for Natásha, who had protested, scolded him, even cried about it. The kind-hearted Aleósha very often would ponder for a week as to what he could get to please her, and how he was to raise the wind for it, thoroughly enjoying the anticipation, and sometimes telling me, gleefully, long before the day, all about what he was going to give her, and so on; but he used to be considerably discouraged by her scolding and tears, so that he was sorry he had spent the money; and the result of all his pleasurable anticipations was that they quarrelled and scolded over the presents which he had so looked forward to giving her. But, besides this, Aleósha spent a good deal of money quietly, that Natásha knew nothing about. His old school-fellows led him astray; he would make violent love to some Josephine or Mina, and all the same he loved Natásha through it all. But his love seemed to have an element of torture in it; he used to come to me very often—out of sorts, and low in spirits—and swear that he was not worth Natásha's little finger; that he was a vile, useless wretch; and that he did not understand, and was quite unworthy of her. And he was generally right, too, for they were a very badly assorted couple. He always felt like a child before her, and she always treated him as a boy.

He used to tell me of his many youthful escapades, and beg me, with tears, to say nothing about them to Natásha; but when he started off with me—he always insisted on my going

with him, imagining that I could protect him somehow from the scolding he expected, and protesting that he didn't dare look Natásha in the face, alone, after his sins—repentant and frightened, to see Natásha and confess, the girl always knew what was the matter at the first glance.

She was always particularly jealous, and yet she invariably forgave him these freaks of his. This is what usually happened in these cases : Aleósha came in and began to talk to her in a shamefaced sort of way, looking sheepishly tender and gazing into her eyes ; she immediately knew by these signs that he had been guilty of something or other, but never betrayed her knowledge, never cross-questioned him, or asked him anything inconvenient to answer—on the contrary, she redoubled her caresses and tender looks and words, and grew lively and radiant. It was not a case of deceit on her part ; she was not playing a game with him ; oh, dear no, but it seemed to be an everlasting joy and satisfaction to this sweet nature to pity and pardon.

Of course, there was never anything particularly serious the matter—some girl or other was always at the bottom of it, and Aleósha, when he saw Natásha's kindness and readiness to forgive, invariably plunged headlong into a voluntary confession, unable to contain himself any longer, and dying to "relieve his soul" as he called it, and to be "as we were before" to each other. On receiving Natásha's forgiveness he would burst out into a transport of joy, very often crying for happiness in his tenderness towards Natásha, and kissed and embraced her in his ecstasy. After this reconciliation he used always to develop the wildest spirits, and would tell all about his love passages with Josephine, or whoever it might be, as candidly as possible, making a joke of it, laughing and chuckling alternately, blessing and kissing Natásha, as happy and simple as any child ; and so the evening passed happily and gaily after all.

When he had spent all his money, Aleósha began to sell various things ; at Natásha's instigation they took a small and cheap lodging on the Fontánka, but the sale of his property went on, and Natásha had even to part with some of her clothes, and was obliged to look out for work. When Aleósha heard this he was in despair, he cursed himself, declared that he loathed himself, but did nothing whatever to improve matters. At the moment of which I am speaking, even the proceeds of these sales of clothes, and so on, had been spent, and there

was nothing left them but what could be made by needlework, which was uncommonly little.

From the first moment of their setting up an establishment together, Aleósha had had a dreadful quarrel with his father. The prince's intention to marry his son to Katherine was at that time in an embryo condition, but the prince was keenly anxious to bring about this, his pet project, and did his utmost to make Aleósha ingratiate himself with the girl, bullying him with arguments and threats. However, the project was defeated, at first, by the opposition of the countess, as we have seen, so that the prince decided to ignore Aleósha's connection with Natásha for the time, feeling pretty sure that the flighty and weak-minded boy would very soon cool and forget all about her.

As for the question of the possibility of Aleósha marrying Natásha, the prince hardly gave himself a thought about it until the last moment ; and as for the young people, they put off the marriage until they should be enabled to get the prince to give a formal consent, or, in a couple of words, until better times. Natásha, however, did not seem to care to talk about it at all. Aleósha gave me to understand privately that his father was in reality rather pleased with the present state of affairs, he liked to think of the state of feeling of the Ikméniefs under the circumstances. He made a show of recording his displeasure periodically, and cut down Aleósha's already scanty allowance (he was always very close-fisted with his son), and threatened to deprive him of it altogether ; but soon after this he went off to Poland to see the countess who had affairs there to look after, although never ceasing to wish and work for Aleósha's marriage with Katherine.

Aleósha was certainly rather young to be married, but then the countess's step-daughter was so delightfully rich, he really could not miss such a chance ! He hit upon a plan, before long, to push matters in the direction he wished, and soon rumours began to get about that Aleósha was engaged. At this time the prince had just come back from Poland, and received his son kindly, but was disagreeably surprised at the persistence of his love for Natásha ; he became suspicious and alarmed, and sternly ordered Aleósha to break with her, but immediately afterwards thought of a much better plan, and took the boy away with him to see the countess.

Katherine, who was almost a child, was a very sweet girl. She possessed the kindest of hearts, was very clever, and of an

affectionate disposition. The prince thought that the six months of Aleósha's passion for Natásha must now make themselves felt—she had no longer the charm of novelty for him—and that he would probably look at Katherine now with very different eyes, and with far more favour than half a year before.

The prince was right. Aleósha was decidedly taken with the girl. I may add that the prince now became wonderfully polite and kind towards his son; he did not, however, say a word about allowing him any more money. Aleósha knew very well that the prince was only hiding his inflexible and invincible resolve beneath his charm of manner, and chafed and resisted; but his opposition was very much modified since he had begun to see Katherine every day.

I knew that on this particular day of which I write, Natásha had not seen a sign of him for five days. He had not been near her. On my way to her house from the Ikméniefs' I thought over the matter and wondered what she could have specially to say to me; I was anxious about it. The light was burning in her window; I saw it a long way off. We had long had an agreement that she was to put a light in the window if she urgently required to see me about anything; so that I could at any time tell—for I passed her window nearly every night,—by the unusual light there, whether I was wanted, and if she were waiting up for me. Lately the poor girl's candle was very often there.

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## CHAPTER XV.

I FOUND Natásha alone; she was walking slowly up and down the room, with her hands folded over her breast, deep in thought. The tea-urn was hissing on the table, it had been got ready for me a long time before I came; she said nothing, but smiled and pressed my hand. Her face was pale, and had an expression of suffering upon it. There was a painful suggestion of endurance and resignation in her smile, but it was tender, too; and her large blue open eyes

seemed larger than they had been before, and her hair looked thicker. Probably all this was the effect of illness and of her dreadful thinness.

"I really thought you were not coming," she said, giving me her hand again. "I was very near sending Mavra to enquire about you ; I thought you might be ill again."

"Oh, no, I'm not ill," I said. "I have been delayed ; I'll tell you all about it afterwards. Now tell me, Natásha, what is it, what has happened?"

"Nothing," she said, pretending to be surprised at the question, "why should anything have happened?"

"Why, you wrote to me ; you wrote yesterday and asked me to come round. You specially begged me to come at a certain moment ; not a minute earlier or later you said. That doesn't sound like an ordinary invitation to tea."

"Oh yes, I forgot. You see I expected *him* yesterday."

"Hasn't he been *yet*?" I asked.

"No," she said, and paused ; then she continued, "and I was thinking that if he doesn't come I must talk things over with you."

"Did you expect him to-day?"

"No ; he goes *there* in the evenings?"

"You don't mean to say that you think he'll not come any more *at all*?"

"Of course he will," she answered, and looked at me, as it seemed, with more than her usual seriousness. She did not like the rapidity with which my questions followed one another.

We said nothing more then, but walked up and down the room together without a word. At last she smiled and went on—

"I've been waiting for you a long time, Vánia ; and do you know how I have been amusing myself? I have been walking about here reading poetry the whole evening. Do you remember that poem about—

'The sledge-bells rang upon the road.'

"We read it together once ; don't you know it? It goes on about—

'The voice of my poet, my love—  
When will he come with his sledge-bells  
Clanging along the road?  
When will he come to rest  
Here on my breast?'

—and so on.

"Isn't it a pretty picture, Vánia? I can imagine the very house, in any village (ours down there, for instance), and the 'samovar' hissing on the table. The house that I see is one of those new huts (don't you remember) made of rough logs not even boarded over. Then there's another picture (don't you recollect) where her poet comes driving along with his bells clanging sadly, and finds no one at her window to meet him? It all seems so life-like to me; so sad and yet so pretty."

She stopped, as though attacked with a sudden spasm of the throat, but she went on after a minute—

"Dear old Vánia," she said, and paused again as if she had forgotten what she meant to say, and we continued our march up and down the room together.

The little lamp was burning before the "ikon" in the corner. I forgot to mention that Natásha had not been so particular with regard to her religious observances lately as before, and she did not like talking about these matters.

"Is it a holiday to-morrow?" I asked. "You have your lamp burning."

"No," she said curtly, and changed the subject.

"Sit down, Vánia," she added; "have some tea. You haven't had tea yet, have you?"

"Yes, I have had tea, Natásha, but let's sit down by all means."

"Where have you come from just now?" she asked me.

"From *them*," I said. We always referred to her old home as "*their* house."

"From them? Tell me all about it, quick; were you invited or did you drop in?"

She deluged me with questions; her face was paler than ever with agitation.

I told her all the particulars of my meeting with her father; my conversation with her mother; the episode of the locket. I told her every detail, and of every minute shade and expression of her parents' voices. I never concealed anything from her. To-day she listened with intensity of interest, catching every word I spoke almost before it left my mouth; the tears were sparkling in her eyes. The episode of the locket agitated her dreadfully.

"Stop, stop," she cried, several times interrupting my story. "Stop, Vánia, tell me *everything* they said; tell me *all, all*, in detail. You don't give me nearly enough particulars."

I went over the whole of it two or three times, answering dozens of questions each time.

"And do you really think he was coming here?" she asked at last.

"I can't tell, Natásha, I daren't form an opinion; that he is miserable without you, and still loves you, is very certain. But that he was on his way to see you, that—"

"And he kissed the locket, did he?" she interrupted. "What did he say when he kissed it?"

"It was only a series of disjointed words," I said. "He called you all sorts of endearing names—called you to him."

"Called me?"

"Yes."

She wept softly.

"My poor darlings," she said, and after a moment she added, "I am not surprised if he does know all about my affairs. He knows all about the prince's movements, too."

"Natásha," I said firmly, "let's go to him."

"When?" she said, getting a little pale, and half rising from her chair. She seemed to think I meant *at once*.

"No, no, Vánia," she added, putting her hands on both my shoulders, and laughing hoarsely. "No, no, my good boy, you always talk like that, but you had better drop the subject."

"But my dear Natásha," I cried in despair, "surely you don't mean to go on like this for ever? Surely you are not so fatally proud that you can't take the first step towards reconciliation? It's your turn to make a move, you are bound to do it. Perhaps your father is only waiting for this to forgive you all. He is your father, he loves you; respect his pride, Natásha, it is just and natural. You ought to do this; it is your plain duty. Only try, and he will forgive you unconditionally."

"Unconditionally! That's quite impossible, Vánia. Don't reproach me needlessly, dear friend. Believe me, I think of this matter day and night. I don't think a day has passed since I deserted them that I have not thought it all over. Why, I have spoken to you about it dozens of times. You must *know* it is impossible."

"Well, try, at all events."

"No, my friend, I can't; if I did I should only irritate him more against me. You can't recall the past. We shall never be able to recall those happy childish days which I passed with them. If my father were to forgive me and take me back, he



would not know me now. He loved me, but the thing he loved was a girl, a big child; he used to delight in my childish simplicity. When he caressed me he would pat my head just as he did when I was a seven-year-old child, and when sitting on his knee I used to sing him over my little nursery rhymes. From my earliest childhood until the last day I spent at home he used always to come to my bedside and bless me at night. A month or so before all these troubles began he bought me some ear-rings (it was a great secret, but I knew all about it), and he was as happy as a child over it, thinking how pleased I would be to get his present; and how angry he grew with everyone near, especially myself, when he found out that I knew he had the ear-rings for me! Three days before my departure he noticed that I was rather sad, and immediately became quite ill with melancholy himself. And, what do you think? he actually wanted to take me to the theatre to cheer me up, and got the tickets too. I assure you he really thought to cure me of my sorrow by taking me to the theatre! He knew and loved a little child, and could not bring himself to realize that this child would ever grow up to be a woman. It never struck him. So that if I were to go home again *now*, he would simply not know me.

"If he pardoned me," Natásha continued, "whom would he be meeting when I came home? Not me, for I am not the same person. I am not a child at all now: I have lived through too much. Even if he were to like me, he would always be recalling the past, and complaining and getting angry because I was not the same as I used to be, because I was no longer a child. Old things always attract more than new, and yet it is painful to recall the past. Oh, but the past is very dear, Vánia!" she cried, suddenly; and with this exclamation, which seemed to tear its way out of her heart, leaving a track of pain, she paused.

"All this is quite true, Natásha," I said; "but the outcome of it is that he must make your acquaintance over again, and learn to love you once more. Of course, he *will* learn to love you again. You surely don't suppose that he, *he*—a man like that, with such a heart as he has—will not take the trouble to study and understand you anew."

"Oh, Vánia, don't be unreasonable! There is nothing to understand in me more than in other people. It was not that I was speaking about. You see, a father's love is very jealous.

He is offended that all this began without him and finished without him. I mean my affair with Aleósha. He knew nothing of it ; he did not observe its growth. He knows that he had no foreboding of all this, and the unhappy result of our love—my flight—is laid down by him to my mean secrecy. I never came for his advice from the very first, nor did I afterwards confess to him a single phase of my heart's growth in love. On the contrary, I kept it all to myself, and hid everything from him ; and I assure you, Vánia, this secrecy on my part is what has offended him far more than these results of my love—I mean, my desertion of him and my mother, and the fact that I gave up everything for the sake of my lover. I admit that he would probably receive me like a father, tenderly and affectionately ; but the seeds of animosity would still be there. The second or third day there would be signs of unpleasantness, and quarrelling would follow. So that forgiveness, unconditional forgiveness, cannot exist.

“Of course, I am ready to tell him, and to tell him with perfect sincerity, that I realize from the very depths of my heart how much I have offended, and how sadly guilty I am before him. And though it be torture to me,” she continued, “to explain to him, supposing he does not wish to understand it, what all this ‘happiness’ with Aleósha has cost me, and what my own sufferings have been and are ; still, I will sink the pain it must be to me to tell him all about it. I will bear anything. But even this won't be enough for him. He will require indemnification of a kind which it is impossible to give him. He will want me to curse my past, to curse Aleósha, and to repent in dust and ashes my love for him. He will require of me to undo the last half-year, and blot it out of our lives, which is impossible. I will not curse anyone, and I cannot repent. What happened, happened, and it can't be helped. No, no, Vánia ; it really cannot be done. The time has not come yet.”

“When will the time come, then ?” I asked.

“Oh, I don't know, Vánia,” she said. “I can't tell. We must build up our new happiness on some new foundation. We must purchase it with new torments. Suffering wipes out everything. Oh, Vánia, what a deal of pain there is in the world !”

I was silent and looked at her thoughtfully, I suppose, for she said—

"Why do you look at me like that, Aleósha—I mean, Vánia?" she corrected herself, and laughed at her mistake.

"Well, I am looking at your smile, Natásha," I said. "Where did you get it from? You used not to have that kind of smile."

"Why, what is there in my smile?"

"Some of your old simplicity still lingers in it," I answered. "But now when you smile it always seems to me that, at the same moment, you must feel a sharp twinge at your heart. You have got thinner, Natásha, lately, and your hair seems to have grown thicker; is it so? What is that dress you have got on? Surely it was made for you while you were with *them*, wasn't it?"

"How you do love me still, Vánia!" she said, looking tenderly at me. "Now tell me how you are getting on. What are you doing?"

"Nothing new," I said. "I'm still writing that novel; but it's a dreadful business. It doesn't get on as it ought, my inspiration is taking a rest; and yet I have to send a certain number of chapters to the magazine by a fixed day. I am thinking of abandoning the novel, and going in for something light and graceful, something without a scrap of gloom about it, *absolutely*, not a tear to be shed, you know! Everybody is to be jolly and happy in it."

"You poor old fellow, how you do have to work! And what about Smith?"

"Why, Smith's dead long ago!"

"Hasn't he appeared to you? I am serious, Vánia. You are ill, you know, and your nerves are unstrung, you might easily see visions. I thought of that when you told me all about how it was you took your present lodgings. Is your room still damp; it's a nasty room, isn't it?"

"Yes; something did happen to-night, by-the-bye, I'll tell you about it afterwards."

She did not hear me; she was sitting in a brown study.

"I don't understand," she went on, "how I ever could have left *them* then," she said at last. "I was fearfully excited, it was fever," she added, looking at me with an expression which showed that she did not expect me to answer. If I had answered she would not have heard me.

"Vánia," she said, "I asked you to come to-night on purpose."

"What is it?" I enquired.

"I am leaving him," she whispered. I could hardly hear her voice.

"Have you parted, or are you going to part?" I asked.

"This way of living must be put an end to," she cried, "and I sent for you to lay before you all, *everything* that has happened lately, and which I have hidden from you up to now."

She always began like this, but as a rule I found that all the secrets to be divulged were things of which she had informed me already, long ago.

"Oh, Natásha," I blurted out, "I have heard all this a thousand times! Of course you can't go on living together, your union is a very curious one indeed; there is not a single inch of common ground between you. But, have you the needful strength?"

"My dear Vánia," she said, "up to the present I had nothing but projects, but now my mind is quite made up. I love him boundlessly, eternally; but all the same, I am his first enemy. I am wrecking his future. I must free him! He cannot marry me, he is not strong enough to oppose his father. I don't want to bind him, and I am glad he has fallen in love with the bride chosen for him, it will be easier for him to part with me. I see my duty; if I love him I ought to sacrifice everything to him, to show and prove my love, oughtn't I? Isn't that my duty?"

"But you don't, you never *did* coerce him in any way!"

"No, I never do, I shall be exactly the same to him always. If he were to come into the room this moment I should be just the same as usual; but I want to find a way to make it less difficult for him to part with me without feeling ashamed of himself. That's what bothers me; help me, Vánia; suggest something."

"There is but one royal road to that point," I said. "You must cease to love him, and love somebody else instead. And yet that would fail too. You know the man's character. He has not been near you for five days. Assume that he has deserted you. All that you have to do is to write to him, and say that you leave him of your own accord, and he'll trot back to you!"

"Why do you dislike him so, Vánia?"

"I!"

"Yes, you! you! You are his enemy, secretly and openly. You can't talk about him without a tone of vengeance in you

words. I have noticed a thousand times that your chief satisfaction is to vilify and blacken his character. Yes, vilify—I'm telling you the plain truth about it."

"If you have told me so a thousand times, Natásha, surely you need not tell me so any more. Let's change the subject."

"I should like to move into another lodging," she went on after a pause. "Now don't be angry, Vánia."

"He'll come just the same to another lodging. I'm not angry," I said.

"Love is strong. His new love may keep him away; if he did come back to me it would only be for a minute; don't you think so?"

"I don't know, Natásha, really. He is not a man whose actions can be counted upon in any circumstances; he seems to want to marry the other girl and to go on loving you. This seems quite a possible state of things to him."

"If I knew for certain that he loved her I would decide at once. Vánia, don't deceive me! Do you know anything that you don't wish to tell me, or not?" She looked at me anxiously and searchingly.

"I don't know anything, my dear friend," I said; "I give you my word, nothing. I have always been perfectly candid with you. But this is what I think. Perhaps Aleósha is not nearly so much in love with the countess's step-daughter as we suppose, so that—"

"You think so, Vánia! Oh! if I only knew that for certain. If I could but see him now, just for a minute, and look into his face, I should know all about it at a glance. But he is not here, he does not come!"

"But *do* you expect him, Natásha?"

"No, he is with *her*. I know it, for I sent to find out. Oh, how I should like to see *her*, too! Look here, Vánia, is it impossible for me to see her? Couldn't I manage to meet her somewhere? What do you think?" She waited anxiously to hear what I would say.

"Oh, yes; you could see her, of course! But it's not much use *seeing* her only."

"Oh, yes, even that would satisfy me for the present. I could guess the rest. Listen, Vánia! I've grown so stupid lately. I walk up and down here, up and down, and think and think, always alone. My head goes buzzing round and round, and I always feel so heavy. But, listen! I thought of this:

Couldn't you make her acquaintance, Vánia? Why, the countess praised your book; you said so yourself. You go to Prince R——'s evenings now and then, don't you? she goes there too. Get yourself introduced to her there, then you could come and tell me all about her."

"Dear old Natásha, we'll talk of all this by-and-bye; meanwhile listen to me. Do you seriously think that you are strong enough to bear parting with Aleósha? Look at yourself now. Do you think you are calm at this moment?"

"I can bear it," she said, hardly audibly, "it's all for his sake, my whole life is for him. But do you know, Vánia, what I can't bear to think of is that he is with her now; that he has forgotten me, and is sitting by her, laughing and telling stories (you know his way) just as he has sat and chatted here dozens of times. He is looking straight into her eyes; he always looks at one like that, and not a thought of me enters his head—of me, sitting here like this with you." She looked at me despairingly.

"But, Natásha," I said, "you were saying only a minute ago that—"

"Let us break with each other simultaneously," she cut in. "I could bear that and bless him for it; but, oh! Vánia, it's very hard when he forgets me like this *first*. Oh, dear! oh, dear! what a muddle the whole thing is. I can't make myself out; in theory, I know so well what I ought to do, but in practice it always comes out quite different. What's going to become of me?"

"Calm yourself, Natásha." I entreated her.

"Five days, five days!" she went on, "sleeping, or waking, or dreaming, it's always about him, and him, and him. I'll tell you what, Vánia, let's go there; take me there, quick!"

"Oh, Natásha, do be calm!" I cried.

"No, no," she insisted, "let's go! I've waited a long time for you, Vánia. Three days I've thought of this; that was what I wrote to you for. You *ought* to take me there, you ought not to refuse me this, Vánia; I have waited for you so long—three days! There's a party there to-night; and he's there, come!"

She was like one in a delirium. Just then there was a noise in the hall outside; Mavra seemed to be arguing with someone

"Stop, Natásha," I said; "who's that? Listen!" She listened with a sort of incredulous smile, but suddenly grew ashy pale.

"Good heavens! who's there?" she asked, scarcely audibly.

She tried to detain me, but I passed her and went into the hall to speak to Mavra.

Sure enough, there was Master Aleósha! He was asking Mavra something, and she seemed to want to prevent him coming in.

"Oh, it's you, is it?" she was saying to Aleósha; "and, pray, what are you going to find to say for yourself?"

"Oh, I'm not afraid of anybody; I'm going in," said Aleósha, looking rather confused in spite of his boast.

"Hollo!" he said, seeing me. "Well, this *is* luck to find you here!"

"Here I am, you see," he went on; "but look here, how shall I—" He hesitated.

"Go straight in," I said; "what are you afraid of?"

"I'm not afraid of anything, I assure you," he said, "because I am not to blame. You think I *am* to blame; oh, very well, you'll soon see when I justify myself. Natásha!" he continued, "can I come in?"

He had put on a kind of assumed courage and stood at the closed door.

No one answered.

"What's the matter?" he said, and pushing the door open, he timidly glanced round the room; nobody was to be seen.

Suddenly he caught sight of her between the cupboard and the window. She stood there as though hiding, neither alive nor dead.

When I think of this little scene, I can scarcely help laughing, even now; Aleósha quietly and carefully came up near her and stopped.

"Natásha!" he said, "what is it? How d'ye do, Natásha?"

"Why," she said, "I'm quite well."

She spoke with the greatest agitation, and looked just as though she were the guilty party.

"Have—have some tea?"

"Oh, Natásha!" Aleósha cried, puzzled out of his wits, "I dare say you are convinced that I am to blame, but I am not; I am as innocent as a babe. Look here, listen! I'll tell you all about it."

"Why, why! what's the use?" sobbed Natásha, "shake hands, and there's an end of the matter, as usual."

She came out of her corner now, and a ruby blush began

to creep over her cheeks ; she looked down at the ground as though afraid to raise her eyes to Aleósha.

"Oh, dear ! oh, dear !" cried Aleósha, in a state of frenzy, "if only I were guilty I should never look her in the face again. But look here, look here !" turning to me, "she thinks I am in fault ; everything is against me, certainly, all the visible evidence is against me ; I haven't been near her for five days ; rumours reach her that I am with the girl they want me to marry, and yet she forgives me. 'Shake hands,' she says, 'and it's all over !' Natásha, my darling, my angel ! Natásha, believe me, I am innocent. I am *not* guilty ; on the contrary."

"Yes, but you ought to be *there* now ; you are invited *there* to-night. What are you doing here ? What's the time ?"

"Half-past ten. I have been there, but I shammed ill and got away, and that's the first time these five days that I've been free—that I could get out of their clutches and come to you, Natásha. That is, I could have come before, but I didn't, on purpose ; why ? you shall know directly. I'll tell you all ; I have come here on purpose to tell you all about everything, but I give you my word solemnly, this time I am as innocent as a baby ; I really am."

Natásha raised her head and looked at him. His answering look was so frank, his expression was so happy, so honest, and so bright, that it was a downright impossibility to doubt him. I thought they would fly to each others' arms, as they usually did on these occasions, but Natásha, as though overcome with her joy, had let her head fall on her breast, and was crying quietly.

Aleósha could not stand that. He threw himself at her feet, he kissed her hands, her feet ; he behaved like a lunatic generally. I pushed a chair towards her and she sat down ; her limbs were all of a tremble.



## PART II.

### CHAPTER I.

A MINUTE or two after this we were all laughing like mad things.

"Oh, *do* let me get on with my story," Aleósha shouted, overtopping all the laughter with his sonorous voice.

"They think it's just as usual this time, and that I've come here with some cock-and-bull story to stick into them. I tell you I've got a story of thrilling interest. Now then, are you ever going to stop?" he shouted. He was evidently most anxious to tell us his story. One could see by the boy's face that he had important news, but his absurdly dignified look made Natásha laugh, and I couldn't help laughing with her; and the angrier Aleósha got the more we laughed. Aleósha's comical indignation, and then his childish despair, brought us to that stage where anybody need but raise a finger and one quakes with laughter. Mavra had come out of the kitchen, and was staring at us with a melancholy face. She was disappointed that Aleósha had not got a good headwashing from Natásha, as she had hoped he would, and that we all seemed so jolly together, instead of scolding one another.

At last Natásha saw that our mirth was offending Aleósha, and stopped laughing. "What do you want to tell us about?" she asked.

"Shall I bring in the tea-urn?" asked Mavra, looking at Aleósha without much respect in her eyes.

"Oh! go out, go away, Mavra!" he said, motioning her to the door.

"I'm going to tell you everything," he went on, "all that has been, is, and is going to be, because I know all about it. I see you want to know, my dears, where I have been these five days. That's just what I want to tell you, and you won't

let me. Well, in the first place, Natásha, I've been deceiving you the whole time, and long before this, too, and that's the chief point of the whole thing."

"Deceiving me!"

"Yes, deceiving you, for a whole month, before my father came home; but now the time has come for perfect candour. About a month before my father came home I got a tremendous letter from him, and told neither of you anything about it. In this letter he told me straight out and simply, and so solemnly that I was really quite alarmed, that everything was quite arranged about my wedding; that my *fiancée* was perfection, that, of course, I was not in the least worthy of her, but that I must marry her all the same. And in order to prepare myself for her, the first thing I must do was to clear my head of all the nonsense I had got into it, and so on. We all know what the 'nonsense' meant, eh! Well, this letter I kept mum—all to myself."

"You did nothing of the sort," said Natásha, cutting in. "That's a pretty cool assertion! Why, you told us every word of it. I can even remember what a good boy you became just then, and how tender you were to me, and never left me for a minute, just as if you had been naughty, and you told us every scrap of the letter, bit by bit."

"Impossible! Anyhow, I didn't tell you the chief news in it. Of course, you may have guessed it, that's your affair, but I know I never let it out, and I suffered in stifling it down, I can tell you."

"My dear Aleósha," I said, "I remember you talking it all over with us, and telling us all about it."

"Of course you did," said Natásha. "So no more boasting. Even Mavra remembers your letting out about the letter."

"Oh, well! oh, well! perhaps I did tell you something about it; yes, I remember there was something of the sort," Aleósha explained, "but the *tone* of the letter, that's what was the chief point, the *tone*."

"Well, what about the *tone*?" asked Natásha.

"Look here, Natásha, you go on as if the whole thing were a joke. *Don't* make a joke of it; it's serious enough, I assure you. I know I dropped my hands when I got that letter. Never had my father spoken to me like that before. It was, 'You shall do as I wish, if the whole town comes down about our ears for it'—that sort of *tone*."

"Well, go on, why had you to conceal it from me?"

"Why, so as not to frighten you. I hoped it would all right itself. Well, after this letter, as soon as my father arrived, all my troubles began. I prepared to answer him firmly, clearly, and seriously, but somehow it did not come off. He never even asked me a word about it, the sly old fellow; in fact, he went on as though the whole thing was settled, and as if there never was or could be such a thing as a difference of opinion between him and myself. He grew so kind and nice to me, I was quite surprised. You know, Vánia, he is an uncommonly clever man is my father. He has read everything and knows everything. You have only to look at him once, and he knows every thought in your head, like his own. I suppose that is why he has been called Jesuitical. Natásha doesn't like my singing his praises. There, don't be angry, Natásha. Then again, he used to give me no money, and yesterday he gave me some. Natásha, my angel, our poverty is over! Look here! All that he had skimped me of before, as a punishment—all the last half-year's allowance, paid up in full! Look what a jolly lot! I haven't counted it up yet. Mavra, look what a lot of money! No more need to pawn our spoons and studs now, Mavra."

He pulled a thick bundle of notes out of his pocket, fifteen hundred roubles, and threw it on the table.

Mavra stared at the money in amazement. Natásha hurried him on with his story. "Well," Aleósha went on, "I thought to myself: what am I to do now? How am I to go against him? Now, I take my oath, and you may both of you be witnesses, that if he had been nasty to me, instead of kind, as he was, I shouldn't have thought twice about it. I should simply have told him 'No! I don't want to marry the girl. I am a grown up man, and I won't do it, and there's an end of the matter. I assure you I should have stuck up to him. But, as things were, what was I to say to him? Don't blame me; I see you are looking dissatisfied, Natásha. Why do you two exchange glances like that? I see you think I was caught at once, and that there isn't a scrap of firmness about me. I *have* got firmness, as it happens, and a good deal more of it than you suppose, and the proof of it is that I said to myself: My duty is to tell my father everything. And, what's more, I went and told him, too, every word, and he heard me out."

"But what did you tell him?" asked Natásha, looking anxious.

"Why, that I did not want any *fiancée*, that I had my own—you, you know! That is, I haven't exactly told him quite this, up to now, but I've prepared his mind for it, and I'm going to tell him all about it to-morrow; I've decided on *that*. Well, first I told him that it is a shameful and dishonourable thing to marry for money; and that it is all humbug to consider ourselves aristocrats (I was very frank with him you see), and that I was proud to be like everyone else, and didn't want to be considered different. I spoke with warmth and fire, and rather astonished myself. I proved to him, from his own point of view, that we were a very poor sort of princes."

"We are princes," I said, "but only by birth. Wealth is the principal and most princely thing, and we haven't got it. The prince among princes now is Rothschild. Society hadn't heard much about us," I said, "for a long while. My grandfather had spent all we possessed as a family, and it was no thanks to him that we were not ploughmen, as some born princes have become in this country. I proved to him with the greatest eloquence that we have nothing to keep up. He didn't contradict me, but just suggested that I had better call on the Count Nainsky again all the same, and that I must do the dutiful to my godmother, Princess K., because she can push me on in the world. All this was just a gentle hint that when you and I fell in love with each other, Natásha, I threw over all these good people, that this was the effect of your influence, in fact. He has not referred to you directly though; indeed he evidently avoids doing so. We are both as cunning as foxes, and we lie in wait for each other, and entrap each other grandly. There'll be some fun yet!"

"Oh, Alcósha, what a child you are; do go on. How did it all end? tell us. What did he decide? that's the principal point!"

"Oh, goodness knows, one can't make out what he has decided upon. (As for my being a child, I am far from it). He hasn't decided anything—that's where we are, and he only smiled at all my arguments, but his smile was a kind one, as if he pitied me. 'I quite agree with you,' he told me, 'but come along to Count Nainsky's, and mind you don't talk like this *there*; I understand you, you know, but perhaps *they* wouldn't.' I don't think they quite understand *him*

either, and they are angry about something or other. I hardly know how it is, but people don't seem to like my father. Count Nainsky was as haughty as possible with me, when I first went, but I have played my cards so cunningly that he is as fond of me as he can be now."

"Look here, Alcósha," cried Natásha, impatiently, "*do* stick to the point. I thought you were going to tell us something that concerns ourselves, not all about your counts and countesses. What have I to do with your counts?"

"Well, after calling at the count's, I went with my father to see the princess, my godmother, who is very old and very deaf, and very fond of little dogs, of which she has a whole collection. In spite of her infirmities, the old lady is very great in society, even the superb Count Nainsky is at her beck and call. Well, on the way to her house I laid a plan of operations, and what do you think I founded my plan upon? Why, on the fact that little dogs are all very fond of me. They are, really; whether it's some magnetism in me, or because I'm very fond of them and all animals, I don't know. By-the-bye, talking of magnetism, Natásha, I haven't told you yet how we raised spirits the other day. I was at a medium's; I assure you, Vánia, it was most interesting and astonishing; I called up Julius Cæsar."

"Good heavens! Why Julius Cæsar of all people?" cried Natásha, laughing.

"Why not Julius Cæsar? What are you laughing at?"

"Well; what did Julius Cæsar say?"

"He didn't say anything. I took hold of a pencil and it ran about over a bit of paper and wrote of itself, and they told me it was Julius Cæsar writing. I didn't believe that."

"Well, let's hear about the princess."

"I was going to tell you all about it when you interrupted me. We got to the house, and I began my tactics by playing with Mimy. Mimy is a nasty little, old, ugly lapdog, snarly and snappy too, and as obstinate as a pig. The princess is wild about her; she loves her so. I think they were born about the same year. Well, I began by stuffing Mimy with sweets, and in about ten minutes I taught her to hold out her paw, which they had failed to do all their lives. The princess went into ecstasies; she almost cried for joy. 'Mimy, Mimy, Mimy, she can give you her paw!' Somebody came to call. Mimy can give a paw! My godson here taught her.

Count Nainsky came in. 'Mimy can give a paw!' She looked at me with a tenderness that threatened weeping on my shoulder. Oh, the kindest old woman, I'm sorry for her!

"Well," he continued, "I made another move. She had a snuff-box with a portrait, on the lid, of herself as a bride about sixty years ago. She knocked this snuff-box over, and I ran and picked it up. 'Oh, what a lovely picture,' I said. 'What ideal beauty.' After *that*, my dear friends, I can tell you I was all there. It was, where had I been to school? and, what houses did I go to? and what pretty hair I had; and, oh gracious, how the old lady did keep it up! I was pretty smart, too, and made her laugh, and told her funny stories. She loves that sort of thing. She shook her old finger at me; but laughed like anything. When I went away she kissed me, and made the sign of the cross over me, and told me to come up everyday and make her laugh. Count Nainsky pressed my hand, and looked at me with his oily eyes. He was pleased with me; and as for my father, honest and upright and honourable as he is, I assure you he nearly cried for joy when we two got home. He embraced me, and opened his heart to me about careers, and money, and marriage, and that sort of thing; but I didn't understand much of what he was driving at. It was then he gave me this money.

"To-morrow I am off to the old princess's again," he continued without an instant's pause, "but my father is the most honourable of men, Natásha, and you must not misjudge him because he wants to separate us; because you see he is blinded. He wants those millions of theirs, and you haven't got any millions. It's for me he wants them, and for me alone; and it is only his ignorance of you that makes him unjust to you. All fathers wish for their sons' happiness, and it is not his fault if he thinks that *millions* constitute happiness. They are all like this; his class. From one point of view he is perfectly right. I wanted to come and tell you all this as soon as possible, Natásha, because I'm afraid you are prejudiced against him; and no wonder. I don't blame you, you know."

"Then is this all? Is this career that the princess is going to make for you all the result of your arch cunning?" asked Natásha.

"Of course not. What an idea. This is only the beginning. Why, I get hold of the princess simply in order to have my father in my hands. My real history hasn't even begun yet."

“Well, go on with your story.”

“To-day a very strange thing happened, and to this moment I am quite amazed at it,” Aleósha went on. “I must tell you that though my father and the countess have quite decided upon my marriage, still there has been no *official* engagement, and if we broke it all off this moment there would be no scandal. Count Nainsky is the only man who knows about it, but he is a sort of relative and guardian. Besides, though Kátia and I have become great friends during the last fortnight, still we had never said a word until this evening about the future, that is, about marriage, and—well, about love. Then again, the princess has to be asked her consent, for they expect all sorts of things from her protection—showers of gold, and all that kind of thing. What *she* thinks about it, the *world* will think; she is so influential. They want me to go into society, and all that; principally the countess, Kátia’s step-mother; she is very keen on this.

“You see, I believe the princess won’t receive the countess as yet,” Aleósha explained; “probably on account of those little affairs of hers abroad; and as the princess doesn’t, others don’t either; and that’s why the countess, who was against my marriage at first, has come round. It would be a connecting link between her and society, you see. So she was as pleased as possible with my success at the princess’s to-day. But all that’s detail. The principal thing is this: I knew Kátia last year, of course; but I was a mere boy then, and knew nothing about women; therefore I didn’t see much in her—”

“In fact,” Natásha cut in, “you loved me better than her then, and so you didn’t see so much of her, but now—”

“Not another word, Natásha!” cried Aleósha, hotly. “You are quite mistaken. You injure me. I won’t condescend to contradict you, but listen further, and you shall see for yourself. Oh, if you only knew Kátia! such a dear, kind, gentle, open heart, it is. But you shall hear all about it. All you have to do is to listen to me. A couple of weeks ago, when they arrived, and my father took me to see them, I began to study the girl systematically. I observed that she was studying me, too. This interested me in her all the more, and put me on my mettle; and then, of course, I had my own particular reasons for getting to know her; my father’s letter, in fact. So that I went in for studying her thoroughly. Well, I’m not going to go into ecstasies over her, but I will just say

this: she is the one brilliant exception to her whole circle; such a beautiful nature she has, such a firm, right-minded character, so strong in her own righteousness and purity of soul, that I am just like a little boy before her, like a younger brother; although she is only seventeen years old after all.

"I noticed, too, that she has a sort of secret melancholy about her," he went on. "She is so very quiet, hardly speaks a word at home, as though she were frightened, and is always thinking about something. She always seems to be afraid of my father, and doesn't love her step-mother. I guessed that much. The old countess pretends that her step-daughter is as fond of her as can be, for some reason or other. But it's all nonsense. She obeys her, of course; but that's all. Well, a few days ago I determined, having completed my study of the girl's character, to take the step I thought right, and this evening I took it. That is, to tell Kátia *everything*! To confess the whole thing, range her on our side, and finish the matter off, once for all."

"How! Tell her what? Confess what?" Natásha asked, anxiously.

"Everything, everything," Aleósha replied. "And what's more, thank God that I was inspired to do it. Listen, now, listen. Four days ago I determined to keep away from you while I finished off this business. If I had been with you I should have vacillated the whole time, and never should have made up my mind. But, being alone, and steadying my nerves every minute to be brave and do my duty, I *was* brave, and did it. I determined to come back to you with a *result*, and I have come back with a result."

"What, what! Do tell us all about it quicker!"

"Very simple, the whole thing. I just went bravely up to her, and frankly—but wait a bit, I must first tell you one thing which surprised me very much. My father got a letter this morning. I was just coming into the room, and he was standing with the letter in his hands, evidently quite surprised by its contents. Suddenly he began walking about, and then commenced laughing like mad; he was clearly delighted about something, and when I went in he spoke to me like one in a dream, then suddenly broke off, and told me to be quick and get ready to go off to Kátia's with him. Pretty early in the day, for a visit, wasn't it? You know, Natásha, there wasn't a party there to-day, as you said; you must have been misinformed."



"Oh, Aleósha, *do* go on. Tell me what you told Kátia."

"Well, luckily, we had a whole hour to ourselves, she and I. I just told her that they might betroth us as much as they liked, but that we could never be married, that I felt the greatest sympathy for her, and that she alone could save me; and then I told her everything. Would you believe it, Natásha, she had not known a *word* about us, you and me, not one word. You should have seen how she was affected by my story. At first she seemed frightened and became very pale. I told her all our history, how you left your home and everything for me, how we are all alone, and how we get worried all round, and how we both came to her now (I spoke as from you too, Natásha), and entreated her to be on our side, and simply to go to her step-mother and tell her that she refused to marry me. I said this was our only hope, and the only way we could be saved. She listened so kindly and sympathetically—how lovely her eyes looked just then! I think her whole soul was in them; they are blue, you know. She thanked me for trusting her, and promised her help; and then began to ask all about you, and said she would like to know you, and asked me to tell you that she loves you already like a sister, and that you must love her as a sister; and as soon as she heard that I had not seen you for five days she drove me away to see you."

Natásha was touched.

"And you could tell us all that trash about the princess and Mimy with *this* behind untold! Oh, Aleósha, Aleósha, what a child you are! and was Kátia quite lively and happy when she gave you up? Did she seem to be indifferent?"

"Yes, she was glad of the opportunity to do a generous action; but she cried all the same. She loves me too, you know, Natásha. She admitted that she had begun to love me, that she never saw anyone, and that she had long liked me. She liked me specially because all about her there was nothing but cunning and lying, and I seemed to her to be an honest and candid sort of fellow. At last she got up and said, 'Well, God help you, Aleósha—' and didn't finish her sentence, but burst into tears and went out. We agreed that to-morrow she is to tell her step-mother that she will not marry me, and that I am to tell my father equally formally and plainly all about it. She pitched into me for not telling him before, an 'honest man need not be afraid of anything,' she said.

"She is such a dear, good girl," Aleósha resumed with feeling.

"She doesn't like my father, she says he is too cunning, and is a money hunter. I defended him, but I couldn't convince her. If I don't succeed with my father to-morrow, then we both agreed I must go to the princess (my godmother) for protection. If she is on our side not one of them will dare say a word against us. We gave each other our word to be like brother and sister. Oh, Natásha, if you only knew her and her history, how unhappy she is in that set of hers, and how she hates it all; she didn't tell me right out, but I could see it by various hints she dropped. My beautiful Natásha! how she would love you if she saw you, and what a good heart she has. You are born to be sisters, you and she. I should like just to get you together and then stand aside and revel in love for both of you. You mustn't misunderstand me, Natásha, you don't mind my talking about her? I like talking about her to you, and about you to her; you know well enough I love you best—you are my all!"

She looked at him caressingly, but with a sort of sadness in her eyes; his words soothed and yet tormented her, somehow.

"I began to like her more than a fortnight ago," he went on; "I used to go there every night you know, and come home and think of you both, and compare you together."

"And which of us gained by the comparison?" asked Natásha smiling.

"Sometimes one and sometimes the other, but you always triumphed over her in the end. Whenever I speak to her I feel myself getting better and more generous somehow, and more manly and noble. Well, well! to-morrow will decide everything."

"Aren't you sorry for her? Why, you said yourself that she loved you; you noticed it!"

"Yes, I am very sorry, Natásha, but we'll all three love each other, and then—"

"And then good-bye!" said Natásha softly, as though to herself.

Aleósha looked at her enquiringly, but just at this point our conversation was interrupted most unexpectedly. In the kitchen, which was entrance hall and everything in this lodging, there was a sound as of somebody coming in, a minute after Mavra put her head in and proceeded to beckon Aleósha out.

"Somebody wants to speak to you," she said in a mysterious whisper.

"Who can want me here?" said Aleósha, looking at us with a bewildered air, "I shall go and see."

In the kitchen was the old prince's liveried valet. It appeared that the prince had passed Natásha's lodging on his way home in his carriage, and had stopped to enquire whether Aleósha was in there. The valet went away.

"How strange it is!" said Aleósha, looking very uncomfortable. He never did this before; whatever does it mean?"

Natásha looked anxious too. At last Mavra opened the door again.

"The prince is coming in," she whispered hurriedly, and promptly popped back again.

Natásha grew pale and stood up; her eyes seemed to become brighter. She leant lightly against the table and stared at the door through which the prince was about to enter, an uninvited guest.

"Natásha, don't be afraid, you are with *me*, he shall not bully you," said Aleósha, looking frightened but not losing his head.

The door opened, and on the threshold appeared the old prince Valkofski *in propria personá*.

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## CHAPTER II.

HE glanced keenly at us, but in that first glance it was impossible to detect whether he came as a friend or a foe. However, let me describe him. He specially struck me this evening, though I had seen him before.

The prince was a man of forty-five, not more, with regular and very handsome features, whose expression changed with every variety and turn of circumstance, but changed not as expressions usually change; his look went direct from the very height of benevolence or pleasure to the extreme depth of surliness or anger, changing like a flash, as though some spring or wire were pulled. His face was a regular oval and tanned a brownish colour, his teeth were splendid, his lips thin,

and mouth small; he had a well chiselled nose, rather long, and beautifully pencilled nostrils, a high forehead, without a single wrinkle on it, and large grey eyes. All this ought to have made him a handsome man, and yet his face did not leave a pleasant impression.

The face was an unpleasant one because the expression never seemed to be its own; it always appeared as though put on—borrowed; and one felt a sort of conviction that it must be *impossible* to get at the man's *real* expression. Observing him still more closely, you soon began to see beneath his perpetual mask a something cunning and wicked, and *intensely* egotistical. But what especially claimed one's attention was his splendid open grey eyes. They alone seemed to refuse to yield invariable subservience to his will; and when he wanted to look altogether kind and benevolent they would emit rays of mixed import; so that in his soft and benevolent looks one could detect glances betraying suspicion, harshness and mischief.

He was fairly tall, well put together, rather thin, and always looked much younger than he really was. His ears, hands, and feet were beautifully shaped; this was his family inheritance. His clothes were always perfect, and he had several of the ways of a young man—knacks which he hit off admirably and with great success. He looked like Aleósha's elder brother; at all events, nobody could have taken him for the father of so grown-up a son.

He went straight up to Natásha and said, looking firmly into her face:

"I know my coming here at this time of the evening, and without invitation, is not in strict accordance with the rules of etiquette; but I hope you will believe that I am painfully aware of the eccentricity of my conduct. You see, I know whom I have to deal with. I know you are high-minded and sympathetic; so, may I ask for just ten minutes of your time? I am sure you will then understand my coming, and will forgive, if not appreciate it."

He said all this most courteously, but firmly, and with a sort of insistence.

"Take a seat," said Natásha, not quite rid of the confusion which she had felt at first, and of the timidity that seemed to have come over her.

He bowed slightly and sat down.

"First of all let me say a couple of words to him," he said, pointing to Aleósha.

"Aleósha," he began, "you had only just left the house (without saying good-bye to me, or letting me know you were going, by the same token) when they came and told the countess that Kátia was fainting. The countess jumped up to go to her, when Kátia came in herself in the greatest agitation. She told us plainly that she could never be your wife. She said she would join a convent, and that you yourself had begged her to help you, and had told her you loved this lady, Natásha Nicolaevna. Of course, Kátia's state of agitation was the result of your communication to her. She was beside herself. You may imagine how thunderstruck I was, and how shocked."

"Driving by just now," he went on, turning to Natásha, "I saw the light in your windows. An idea which had been hovering about me some time seemed now to gain such hold upon me that I could not resist it, and came in to see you. Why? you will ask. I will tell you; but I must beg you first of all to excuse any crudeness about my explanation, it is all so sudden."

"I trust I shall understand and value your communication as I ought," said Natásha, with hesitation.

The prince looked keenly at her, as though he would read her very thoughts.

"I trust to your penetration," he continued "and if I presumed to come to your house in this way, I did so in the full knowledge of the sort of person I had to deal with. I have long known and appreciated you, although my conduct towards you may have often appeared reprehensible and, perhaps, unjust in your eyes. But listen. You know, of course, all about the old unpleasantness between myself and your father. I don't justify myself; perhaps I am more to blame than I have thought up till now. If so, I myself was deceived by circumstances. It is the unfortunate disposition of a sour heart to believe in evil more than in good; but I don't hide my own faults. I believed all the rumours I heard, and when you left your home I trembled for Aleósha. But I didn't know you then. Enquiries which I set on foot encouraged me, little by little. I studied the question, and persuaded myself at last that my suspicions were unfounded. I found out that you had quarrelled with your family; and I discovered, too, that your father is very firmly set against your marriage with my son. And the simple fact that you, having such power

over Aleósha as you have, did not use that power to push on his marriage with yourself proves you conclusively to be—well, a most admirable young woman.” The prince bowed courteously.

“Meanwhile, I do not conceal from you, that I worked tooth and nail against your marriage with Aleósha, I admit this, and perhaps I am expressing myself too brusquely; but frankness is my principal aim at this moment, you will admit it as I go on. Well, soon after you left your home, I went away; but in leaving Petersburg I had no fear for Aleósha, because I trusted to your high-minded pride. I well understood that you yourself would not desire to marry Aleósha before our family quarrels were settled. I felt that you were unwilling to destroy the accord between Aleósha and myself (for I could not have forgiven his marrying you). I knew, too, that you would never like it to be said of you, that you were on the look out for a husband who was the son of a prince, and that you were dying to marry into our family; on the contrary, I knew you disdained us, and were probably waiting for the moment when I should come and beg you to honour us by giving your hand to my son. Still I remained your enemy. I don't justify myself, mind; but I will not conceal my motives—here they are: you are unknown and poor. Now, though I have a little money, we want a good deal more. Our family is on the decline. We *must* have connection and wealth. Kátia has not much connection, certainly, but she is very rich; a little delay, and we might have lost her as Aleósha's betrothed. I could not miss such a chance, and, in spite of his youth, I determined to marry him to Kátia. You see, I do not conceal anything from you.

“You may,” he added ingenuously, “well look upon my father, who has confessed to having tried to persuade his son, out of greed, to commit a wicked act, with suspicion; for it *is* a wicked act to desert a high-minded girl, who has sacrificed everything for his sake, and towards whom he has not behaved altogether as he might. But I do not attempt to justify myself. The second reason I had for wishing my son to marry the countess's step-daughter was that Kátia is, in the fullest sense of the word, absolutely worthy of all love and esteem. She is wonderfully well-bred, very good in disposition, with the sweetest nature, clever too, although still a child in many ways. Aleósha has no character, he is a young scatter-brain and as thoughtless as a child; in fact, at twenty-two years old he is ..

child still. He has one good thing, however—a kind heart ; but that is a dangerous quality in conjunction with his other characteristics. I have long observed that my influence over him is on the decrease.

“ Youthful ardour,” the prince continued, “ begins to have its own way now-a-days ; I can’t manage him. Perhaps I am too fond of the boy, but I am persuaded that he requires more than myself alone to guide him. He ought to be under some continuous high moral direction ; his nature is far more cut out for submission and for loving obedience, than for command. He will always be so to the end of his days ; imagine, then, my delight to find in Kátia a girl—the ideal of the girl to whom I would like to marry Aleósha ; but I rejoiced, reckoning without mine host ! I found that another influence was at work, indestructible and overtopping Kátia’s, I mean yours. I observed him keenly a month ago, when I returned, and could not help remarking his great improvement for the better. His childishness and light-headedness were there as usual, but he seemed to care less for childish amusements and had gained higher ground in his aspirations ; he thought more of honour and lofty aims, and so on ; his ideas were crude and strange, of course, but his wishes, his aims, his heart had taken a better tone, and that is the chief thing.

“ Now all this was unquestionably your doing ;” the prince inclined his head towards Natá-ha, “ you seem to have brought him up all over again—I confess I had the idea at this time that probably *you* could secure his happiness more surely than anyone else, but I did not wish to harbour this idea, I chased it from my brain ; I wanted to get him away from you, cost what it might, and devoted my whole mind and energy to attaining this end. An hour ago I still thought that the victory was on my side. But the occurrence at the countess’s quite upset all my calculations, and, above all, I was struck by the unexpected fact of Aleósha’s seriousness, and of the wonderful strength and pertinacity and *vitality*, of his attachment to you. I repeat, you have changed him entirely. I suddenly became aware that the change for the better which I had observed in him went further than I had thought ; to-day he has shown signs of a kind of wisdom of which I did not even suspect him to be possessed, and, at the same time, of a refined sagacity of mind. He chose, the very best way to get out of a difficulty. He awoke and touched the noblest sentiments of the human heart, that of the power

of extending forgiveness and remission of faults. He put himself into the hands of the wronged, and flew to *her* for help. It excited all the pride of a woman who loved him already, and admitting to her very face that she had a rival, and at the same time contrived to awake in her a feeling of sympathy to that rival, and to extract from her a promise of forgiveness and an assurance of her disinterested sisterly friendship. To tell her all this and not to offend her, not even to hurt her feelings,—why, this is a feat that the wisest man might fail to perform and which only fresh, ingenuous young hearts, well guided like his, can hope to accomplish safely. I am sure, Natásha Nicolaevna, that you had no share whatever in his action of this evening, neither by word nor advice. Very likely you have just heard all about it from him for the first time. Am I right?"

"Yes," said Natásha, "you are quite right."

Her face was all ablaze, and her eyes were gleaming with a strange light, like that of inspiration. The prince's dialectics were beginning to do their work.

"I haven't seen Aleósha for five days," she went on. "He thought of it all himself, and carried it out all himself, too."

"Quite so," said the prince; "but all this unexpected firmness and good sense of his is the result of your influence upon him. All this I turned over in my mind as I drove along just now, and, while thinking, I suddenly felt the strength to come to a resolution born within me. The marriage between our house and the countess is knocked on the head for ever, it can never be rearranged; if it could be, it *should not!* Why, I am persuaded that you alone could make him happy, that you are his best friend and guide; you have put the commencing stroke to his future happiness. I did not hear anything from you in my speech, and I will hide nothing now. I will tell you frankly, I am hugely fond of a career and money, and eminence, and even rank. But there are circumstances when one must give up one's own ideas, and other conditions under which everything cannot be measured with the same standard; besides which I am very fond of my son; in fact, I have come to this conclusion; that you and Aleósha must not be parted, or the poor boy will be ruined. And now, shall I confess it? I must have come to this conclusion a month ago, at



yet I have only this very day discovered the fact myself. Of course, I might have told you all this to-morrow, instead of coming in at this time of night; but, at all events, my haste to tell you will have convinced you of my zeal and sincerity.

"I am not a child," continued the prince, "and I could not take such a step as I have just taken without serious thought. I had made up my mind when I came in here, but I'm afraid I shall have to exercise some patience before I can persuade you of my sincerity. However, to business. Must I tell you why I came here? I came to do what I conceive to be my duty—solemnly, and with a sense of boundless regard towards your person. I entreat you to make my son happy, and to accord him your hand! Do not think of me as the cruel father, deciding at length to pardon his children, and to agree to allow them to be happy together. No, no! You would humiliate me if you were to attribute such thoughts to me. Nor would I have you think that I counted on your consent to my entreaty, knowing, as I do, how much you have sacrificed for my son. Oh, no! I am the first to declare that he is not worthy of you. He is a good boy, and will confirm it; but I came here to beg you to accept me (here he rose from his place with some solemnity, and with an air of courtly deference) as your friend. I know, only too well, that I have not the slightest claim to the honour I ask of you, but, may I hope to earn the right some day? May I hope?"

Bowing respectfully before Natásha, the prince awaited her reply.

All the while he had been speaking I had kept a keen observation upon him. He saw this.

Some time afterwards, on looking back to this long speech of his, I remembered several things which struck me as inconsistent with the circumstances, but now it was quite a different thing. He seemed to speak the last words as though from his very soul, and they had so thoroughly the smack of sincerity, and looked so very like the truth, that he quite imposed upon us all. Indeed, something uncommonly like tears seemed to appear on his eyelashes. Natásha's generous heart was quite won. She, like him, rose from her place, and in the extremest agitation, but without speaking, held out her hand to him.

He took it, and kissed it tenderly. Aleósha was beside himself with ecstasy.

"What did I tell you, Natásha?" he cried, "and you wouldn't believe me. You wouldn't believe that this is the most generous man in all the world. There, now you can see it for yourself!"

He rushed to his father and embraced him with warmth. The prince responded, but seemed to wish to bring this scene of agitation to an end. He appeared to be ashamed of showing his feelings.

"Enough, enough!" he said, and took his hat. "I must go now; I asked you for ten minutes and have stayed an hour," he said, smiling.

"May I be allowed to visit you as often as I can?"

"Yes, yes," Natásha replied, "as often as you can. I want to learn to love you." She spoke with some confusion.

"How honest, how true you are," said the prince, smiling as he spoke. "Your candour is very sweet to me, so much more fresh and pleasant than all the artificial politeness I see so much of. But oh, how long I shall have to labour in order to earn your love. I see it."

"Oh, don't; please, don't!" Natásha said, shy and confused. "You are flattering me."

Oh, how lovely she looked at this moment.

"Just two more words," said the prince. "Imagine how unfortunately things have fallen out. I cannot come to see you to-morrow, nor next day. I received a letter this evening, which necessitates my absence. I can't get off it. I must leave Petersburg to-morrow. Don't think, now, that I came in to-night because I should have no time these next few days. Of course, you will not think it. That's just an example of my suspicious nature. This suspicious nature of mine has done me great injury in life. All my quarrels with your good folks arose simply from that characteristic. Let's see, now, to-day's Tuesday; Thursday, Friday, on Saturday, I shall be back, and shall certainly come and see you. May I stay the whole evening?"

"Certainly, certainly," cried Natásha. "Saturday evening, then. I shall wait for you with the greatest impatience."

"How lucky I am, to be sure," said the prince. "I shall get to know you better and better. But I cannot leave the room without shaking you by the hand," he said, turning suddenly to me. "Forgive me, we are all speaking to each other now, as it were, outside of etiquette. You know, I *have* had

the honour of meeting you once or twice, and I think we were even introduced to one another. I cannot leave the room without giving expression to the hope that I may be allowed to renew the great pleasure of your acquaintance."

"We have met, certainly," I answered; "but, excuse me, I cannot remember the introduction you speak of."

I took the hand he held out to me.

"At Prince R's, last year."

"Pardon me, I have forgotten all about it; but I assure you I shall not be so forgetful again. This evening will be especially memorable to me."

"Quite so, and to me also. I have long known you to be the true and tried friend of Natásha Nicolaevna and of my son. My hope is to make a fourth to your three. Am I right?" he asked, turning to Natásha.

"Oh, yes, he is indeed our tried friend; and I should dearly love it, if we four could be together always," replied Natásha, much affected.

Poor dear little woman. She was so delighted to see that the prince had not forgotten to be polite to me. She loved me well. I know it.

"I have met many of your admirers," the prince went on. "There are two especially of your most faithful readers, who would so like to know you personally. They are—my great friend the countess and her step-daughter Kátia. May I hope that you will allow me to introduce you to these ladies?"

"I should feel most flattered," I said; "though I don't go into society much just now."

"But you will give me your address? I must do myself the pleasure of calling."

"Oh, prince! I'm afraid I cannot receive at my lodgings; not at present, at all events."

"But I hope I may be privileged, though I am conscious that I have no right to claim the privilege, to—"

"Oh, of course, if you wish it. I shall be delighted. I live in the—\*pereulok, Klugen's house."

"Klugen's house!" he cried, as though struck with the news. "How! Have you lived there long?"

"No, not long," I replied, observing him involuntarily but closely. "My lodging is N. 44."

"N. 44! and do you live alone?"

"Oh, yes; quite."

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\* Pereulok, a line or small street.

"Dear me! I asked because I seemed to know the house. Oh, well, so much the better! I shall certainly look you up. I have a good deal to say to you, and I expect a good deal from you. You can help me vastly in—something. You see, I am beginning our acquaintance as a beggar. Well, *au revoir*, then. Let me press your hand again."

He pressed my hand and Aleósha's, and kissed Natásha's fingers, and went out, not even asking Aleósha to follow him.

We three remained in a state of the most utter astonishment. All this had happened so suddenly, so unexpectedly. We all felt that *everything* had changed in a moment, and that a new order of things, an unexplored region, was opened out before us. Aleósha sat down softly beside Natásha, and took her hand and kissed it quietly. Now and then he glanced at her face, as though waiting to hear what she would say.

"Aleósha, dear, drive over to Kátia's to-morrow," she said at last.

"I thought of that too," he said. "I will certainly do so."

"Perhaps it may be painful for her to see you. How is it to be managed?"

"I can't tell, darling, but I'll go and see, and decide according to circumstances. Oh, Natásha," he went on, unable to contain his joy, "all is changed for us now!"

She smiled and looked at him long and very tenderly.

"And what good taste he showed. He saw the wretched lodging you occupied, and never made a remark about—"

"Well, what?"

"About getting another, or anything of that sort," said Aleósha, blushing. "He *did* show good taste, didn't he? and how he praised you, Natásha. I told you so, I told you so! He is the sort of man who can understand and appreciate better than anyone. As for myself, he made me out quite a child. They all treat me like that. I suppose it's all right. I am rather that sort of person."

"You are a regular old baby, Aleósha, and yet you are the sharpest of us all. You are a good boy, Aleósha."

"He said my soft heart would ruin me. What did that mean? Do you know, Natásha, I think I ought to go and see him once. What do you think? To-morrow morning I'll come and see you early."

"Yes, go, dear boy, by all means; it's a good idea, and mine

you see him. Come back early to-morrow ; you won't be five days away now, will you?" she said slyly, and with a look of playful tenderness in her eyes.

We were all in a state of placid but perfect happiness.

"Are you coming now, Vaniá?" Aleósha called out from the passage.

"No ; he is not going yet," said Natásha in reply. "I must have a chat with him first. Come early to-morrow, mind !"

"Rather !" shouted Aleósha. "Good-night, Mavra."

Mavra was in a state of the greatest agitation. She had heard enough to show her that a great change had taken place in the prospects of her mistress, and was evidently dying to hear all the particulars.

When we were left alone Natásha took my hand, and we sat silent. She was evidently thinking how to begin.

"Oh, I'm so tired," she said at last, and her voice was weak. "Look here, Vániá, shall you go to *them* to-morrow?"

"Certainly."

"Tell mother all about it, but not *him*."

"Of course not. I never do speak of you to him."

"I know. But he's certain to hear of it. Just think, what will he say, how will he take it? Oh, Vániá, surely he won't curse me for making this marriage? Oh, no, no, Vániá!"

"The prince must arrange everything comfortably," I said, anxious to relieve and soothe her. "He will make peace with your father, and then everything will go smoothly."

"Oh, Vániá, if it only could be so ; if only, *only* it could be so!" she cried. It was almost a prayer in the way she said it.

"Be calm, Natásha," I said. "It will all go well now, it is tending that way."

She gazed at me fixedly. "Vániá, what do you think of the prince?"

"If he is sincere, I think he must be the most generous and noble of men."

"If he is sincere. What does that mean? Could all he said have been insincere? Surely not!"

"Oh, I don't think it at all likely," I replied. But I added to myself, "She evidently has some suspicion all the same. It is very strange."

"You stared at him so fixedly," she said.

"Well, yes ; he struck me a good deal."

"And me too. He seemed to speak the whole time as if— Do you know, Vánia, I am *so* tired. You must go home; but come to-morrow as soon as you can after you have seen *them*. Just tell me this: Was it rude or unkind to say as I did, that I wished to learn to love him soon?"

"No, certainly not; why unkind?"

"Nor—nor foolish? Why, it must have meant—he must have understood that I *don't* love him yet."

"My dear girl, it was beautifully said; so naïve and pretty it was. And you looked so charming just then, too. He must be a great fool if he did not appreciate the taste you showed—he with his society experience."

"You seem to me to dislike him, Vánia. But what a suspicious, bad girl I am! Don't laugh at me, Vánia; I tell you everything, you know. Oh, you dear, good old friend; if I have unhappiness again—were grief to be mine once more, you would come, I know; perhaps you alone of all the world would come to see me. How am I to repay you for all this, dear old Vánia? You must never curse me or hate me, whatever happens."

I went home, undressed, and turned into bed. My room was damp and dark—a regular cellar. A host of ideas and strange sensations held carnival within me, and it was long before I could fall asleep.

Probably, at the same time, there was a certain individual, snugly ensconced in his luxurious bed; who lay there and laughed with the greatest enjoyment to think of us three innocents; that is, if he thought such fools worth laughing at; probably, though, he despised us too much even to laugh at us!

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### CHAPTER III.

NEXT morning, at ten o'clock, when I went out, in hot haste, to see the Ikméniefs, on the Vasslí Ostrof, in order to go thence to Natásha's, I knocked up against my small visitor of the previous day—old Smith's grandchild. She was coming up to my door. I don't know why, but I was overjoyed to see

her. I had not had time to look at her very closely last evening, and now, in daylight, she astonished me more than ever. It would be impossible to find a more strange, more original being—as to exterior I mean—than she was.

Small; with large, black, un-Russian eyes; thick, tangled, black hair; and a sort of dumb, stubborn, but thoughtful expression she might well attract the attention of any passer-by. Her appearance was *most* striking; she looked clever, and had a perpetual expression of mistrust, almost suspicion, about her.

Her torn and dirty dress looked more than ever like a bundle of rags by daylight. She appeared to me to be the victim of some slow, obstinate, killing malady, slowly but surely destroying her being. Her face had a dark, tawny colour, and was very thin; but, in spite of all the perverse conditions of dirt and rags, there was a certain distinct beauty about her. Her eyebrows were well pencilled, thin, and very beautiful; her wide forehead was a very handsome feature, wide and rather low; and her lips were beautifully formed, and had a sort of proud and fearless "set," but they were almost white—they had scarcely any colour whatever in them.

"Oh, here you are again!" I said. "I thought you would turn up; come in!"

She came in, crossing the threshold very gingerly, as she did yesterday, and glancing suspiciously round the room. She seemed to observe everything very carefully, as though making a note of the changes since her grandfather's time. "Like grandfather, like grandchild," I thought. "I hope she is not mad; she hasn't said a word yet!" I waited.

"The books, please," she whispered at last, with her eyes on the ground.

"Oh, yes, your books; here they are. I took care of them for you."

"She looked up at me with curiosity, and her mouth gave a twitch as though she wanted to smile incredulously; but the smile passed off, and her lips assumed their usual austere expression of pride once more.

"Did grandfather tell you about me, then?" She said this ironically, and surveying me all over from head to foot.

"No, he did not; but he—"

"Then how did you know I would 'turn up?' Who told you?" She took me up uncommonly sharp.

"Well, I thought your grandfather could not have lived absolutely alone in the world; he was so old and feeble, and, therefore, I supposed that somebody must have come and looked after him. Here are the books. Are you learning out of them?"

"No."

"What do you want them for?"

"Grandfather taught me out of them when I used to come."

"Did you stop coming then?"

"Yes; I got ill," she said, as if to justify herself.

"Have you a father and mother? What relations have you?"

She frowned and knitted her eyebrows, and looked up at me with a scared look, and then quietly turned round and went out without answering, just as she had done the day before. I followed her with my eyes, but she stopped on the threshold.

"What did he die of?" she asked abruptly, and turning slightly towards me, just as she did the day before, when she asked about Azorka, with her nose against the door.

I went up to her and told her all about it as briefly as I could; she listened quietly and inquisitively, with her head inclined and her back towards me. I told her about the old man having mentioned the Sixth Line, with his dying breath. I thought it probable, I added, that someone dear to him lived there and would come to enquire after him.

"He evidently must have loved you," I said, "to think of you, as he did, at his last moment."

"No," she said, almost involuntarily, "he did not love me at all."

She was very much agitated. In telling my story I had stooped down and looked into her face; I observed that she exercised all her strength to smother her agitation, as though she were too proud to exhibit it before me. She was very pale, and bit her lower lip quite hard. But what especially struck me was the extraordinary beating of her heart; it seemed to beat louder and louder, so that one could hear it two or three paces away, as is the case in aneurism. I thought she would end by bursting into tears, but she repressed the inclination.

"Where's the scaffolding?" she said.

"What scaffolding?"



"The one you say he died under."

"I'll show you when we go out. But listen, what's your name?"

"Oh, never mind!"

"Never mind what?"

"Nothing; I'm not called anything!" She spoke abruptly, and as if vexed, and made a movement as though to go out. I stopped her.

"Wait a minute, you strange girl! Look here, I wish you well; I have been very sorry for you ever since I found you crying on the stairs yesterday. Your grandfather died in my arms, and when he mentioned the Sixth Line with his last breath, he was, as it were, leaving you in my charge. I dream of him! Then I took care of your books for you, and yet for all this you are so shy and strange, just as though you were frightened of me. You are evidently very poor, probably an orphan and in the care of strangers. Is it so?"

I quite entreated her. I don't know why, but I seemed to be so strongly attracted to her. It was not all pity; there was something else. Was it the mystery of the thing, or the impression made upon me by Smith, or my own curious fantastical state of mind and body, or what? Anyhow I felt wonderfully drawn towards her. My words seemed to touch her; she looked strangely at me, not harshly this time, but more gently and for a longer while; then she bent her head again as though in thought.

"Helen," she whispered suddenly, unexpectedly, and very softly.

"What! is your name Helen?"

"Yes."

"Will you come and see me sometimes?"

"I can't; I don't know," she stammered, as if thinking it over. Just then some clock struck. She shivered, and asked me with delirious eagerness:—

"What time was that?"

"Half-past ten, I think."

She gave a cry of alarm, and turned to make off; but once more I stopped her. "I can't let you go like this," I said. "What are you afraid of? Are you late for something?"

"Yes yes; let me go, please; I escaped from her; she'll beat me!" She spoke in a broken voice, struggling to get free from me.

"Listen to me," I said, "and don't struggle. I'm going to Vassili Ostrof; to the Thirteenth Line; I am late, too, and am going to take a droshky. I'll drive you there! You'll get home all the quicker."

"But you mustn't go to where I live!" she cried in extreme agitation. Her features became quite disfigured with simple fear that I should try to find out where she lived.

"I tell you I am going to the Thirteenth Line, *not* to your place. Come along, you'll get there much quicker with me than on foot."

We ran down stairs quickly. I took the first droshky I saw; a very wretched concern it was, too. Helen must evidently have been in a great hurry to consent to go with me. I did not dare ask any questions, for when I *did* ask her whom she was so frightened of at home, she swung her arms about, and became so agitated that she nearly fell out of the droshky. "What on earth can the mystery be?" I thought to myself.

She was very uncomfortable on the droshky. At every jolt she caught hold of my coat with her left hand—a little dirty freckled one it was. She held her books tight in her other hand. It was evident that she valued these books very highly. Once, while recovering her balance, she showed her ankle, and I observed, to my astonishment, that she had nothing but a pair of old torn shoes and no stockings. Although I had determined not to catechise her in any way, I could not help asking her a question.

"Have you really no stockings?" I said, "How can you go about without any in this dreadful, damp, cold weather?"

"No; I haven't any," she answered abruptly.

"But, my dear child, surely you live with somebody. Couldn't you have procured a pair to come out in?"

"I go like this of my own accord."

"But you'll get ill; you'll die."

"Very well, then, I'll die."

She evidently did not like to answer my questions; they annoyed her.

"There, this is where he died," I said, showing her the house under whose shadow the old man had breathed his last.

She looked fixedly at the place, and then suddenly turned to me with entreating eyes, and said—

"*Don't, don't* come after me! I *will* come, I *really* will, as soon as ever I can."

"Very well," I said. "I told you before that I wouldn't. But, what are you afraid of, poor little thing? It pains me to see you like this."

"I'm not afraid of anyone," she answered irritably.

"But you said just now, 'She'll beat me.'"

"Well, *let* her beat me! let her beat me!" she repeated, and her upper lip seemed to curl with scorn and to quiver at the same time.

We reached the "Island" at last. She stopped the driver at the beginning of the Sixth Line, on the quay, and jumped out of the droshky, looking around her in a frightened way.

"Drive away, drive away," she entreated, "don't come after me; do drive away at once."

I drove on. But when I had proceeded a little way along the quay I discharged the droshky, and walked back to the Sixth Line, crossing the road quickly.

I saw her; she had not had time to go far, and she looked all about her as she went; she even stopped every other minute so as to look around her more deliberately. Should I follow her or not? I *did* go on, and, as I hid myself carefully behind gates and lamp-posts whenever she turned round, I managed to keep out of her sight. On she went and I after her, but always on the other side of the road. My curiosity was excited to the highest degree. I had determined not to follow her into any house, but I felt that I must find out which house she lived in. I was under the influence of a weighty depression, such as I felt when I saw the old man's dog, Azorka, lying dead at the confectioner's.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

ON we went; it was a long way, nearly as far as the Small Prospect. She almost ran; at last she went into a little grocery shop.

I stopped and waited. "She can't live in a grocery shop," I thought. After a minute or so she came out, without the books. Instead of the books she had an earthenware cup in

her hand. She went a few paces further, and then passed in at the gate of an ill-favoured looking house—a small, old, two-storied house, painted a dirty yellow. In one of the lower windows—there were but three—there was a little red coffin, serving to show that a coffin-maker plied his trade inside. The second-floor windows were small and square, with dirty panes and pink calico curtains.

I crossed the road, and read on the iron plate over the gateway the legend, "Mrs. Bubnoff's house." I had hardly had time to read this when, from inside the yard, I heard an angry woman's voice raised to scold somebody. I looked in through the gate, and there, on a low flight of steps, leading to a side door, stood a stout-looking woman, dressed in the manner of the lower middle classes, with a handkerchief over her head and a green shawl. Her face was of a hideous purple colour; her little bloodshot eyes were twinkling in a way that meant mischief. She was evidently the worse for drink, in spite of the early hour. She was scolding poor Helen, who stood before her, about something that had to do with the cup which she held in her hand.

From behind her, on the steps, an untidy, powdered, and painted female looked on. A moment after, a door below opened, and there appeared, evidently attracted by the noise going on, a poorly dressed but nice looking, middle aged woman, of a modest and less rowdy type; an old man and a girl looked out of the door behind her. A tall, robust-looking moujik stood in the middle of the yard, probably the "dvornik" (yard-man), and lazily watched the scene, broom in hand.

"Oh you little blood-drinking cursed little villain!" screamed the woman, discharging all her expletives in a sort of volley without commas or pause of any kind, but with an occasional choke in between the words.

"This is the way you repay all my care, is it, scarecrow! I send her out for a few gherkins and she slips away. My heart told me she'd slip away when I sent her. She got her hair half pulled out of her head for doing it yesterday, and to-day she is at it again. Where have you been to, you little vixen; you drop of poison, you? tell me, you little devil, or I'll kill you this minute!"

So saying, the infuriated woman fell upon poor little Helen, but catching sight of the woman looking out of the door below

she stopped, and turning to her began her complaints all over again, seeming to be calling her neighbour to witness the monstrous iniquity of her wretched little victim.

"Her mother died here—you know yourselves, good people," she yelled—"and this brat was left all alone, on your hands—you know she was—and you have hardly enough to feed yourselves. I saw that; and took her in; to please blessed St. Nicholas, I took the orphan. Well, what do you think! I've kept her two whole months drinking my blood, she has sucked my very blood out of me, I tell you. Snake! vermin! vixen! look at her, you may beat her, she never says a word; knock her down, not a word will you get out of her. Whom do you take yourself for, you little green-eyed baboon; you spawn of Satan? you'd have starved in the streets, if it had not been for me; you'd have died but for me, scorpion."

"What's the matter, Anna Trifonova; why excite yourself to such an extent? What has she done to offend you?" asked the woman to whom this raging tigress addressed her remarks.

"What has she done, my excellent friend! What has she done! Disobedience, madam, that's what it is, she's sending me to my grave. I sent her for some gherkins next door, and she comes dancing back three hours after. Where did she go to? where has she been? Who are her new friends? Haven't I been a good friend to her? Yes, and forgave her wretched mother a debt of fourteen roubles, besides; and buried her at my own expense, and then took this little devil of hers in; you know it, my good woman, you know I did. Haven't I a little right over her after all this? She ought to feel my kindness, instead of which she disobeys me. I wanted to make her happy; I got the little rubbish a muslin dress and a new pair of shoes. Would you believe it, in a couple of days she had torn everything to pieces, on purpose too, for I saw her do it myself. 'I want to go about in cotton dresses,' the little vixen said, 'not muslin.' Well, she had to wash the floors for that, and then, bang she had gone—bolted! you heard me beat her last night when she came home. I took away her stockings, and her boots. 'She won't go without them,' I thought, and bang away she goes to-day. Where have you been to, carrion? Speak, you little murrain! Where have you been sneaking to? Whom have you been telling lies to about me? Speak, you gipsy-faced baggage!"

Here she flung herself at the poor frightened child, and scratched her, and pulled her hair like a mad thing.

The cup with the gherkins flew out of the girl's hands and smashed; which still further infuriated the drunken woman. She beat her victim's face and head, but Helen never uttered a sound, nor a cry, nor a complaint of any kind under the storm of blows. I precipitated myself into the yard, hardly knowing what I was doing, so furious I felt, and rushed at the woman.

"What are you doing? How dare you treat a poor little orphan like that?" I cried, catching hold of the Fury's arm.

"What's this? Who are you?" she wheezed, letting go of Helen and resting her hands on her sides. "What may *you* want in my house?"

"I want to tell you that you are a pitiless, cruel woman," I cried. "How dare you tyrannise over a poor child like this? She is not yours. I heard you say yourself that she was an orphan, and that you had taken her in."

"Who are you?" yelled the Fury. "Did you come with her then? Oh! it's to *you* she goes then, is it? Oh! and you think you can come and get up a row in a strange house, do you? Police!"

And she fell on me with her fists.

But at this moment there rang out a dreadful inhuman shriek. I turned round and just caught sight of Helen falling to the ground in a fit of convulsions. Her face was disfigured; it was epilepsy. The untidy-looking woman and a girl ran down the steps, raised her, and carried her up.

"I wish you may die, you useless baggage," cried the Fury after her. "Three fits in a month. Now then, clear out." This last was to me, as she advanced threateningly towards me again. The *dvornik* told me I had better go; there was nothing to be done. I left the yard persuaded that I had done no good by interfering.

But my indignation was bubbling over within me. I got as far as the pavement outside and then looked back. The Fury had rushed upstairs when I left; the *dvornik* had disappeared also. After a minute the woman who had helped to carry Helen in came out of the upper door, and hurried down stairs to her own lodging. Seeing me she stopped and looked at me inquisitively. I liked her quiet, kind face, so I took heart of grace and went back into the yard.

"May I enquire," I said, "who this poor child is, and what she is doing here with that brutal woman? You must not think that I ask out of pure curiosity. I have met the child before, and am very particularly interested in her for a certain reason."

"If you are interested in her you had better take her away with you or find some place for her; that's all I can say," said the woman, edging away from me, and seeming to speak in spite of herself. "She'll come to no good here."

"But unless you tell me what to do I don't know how to set about it. Is that Mrs. Bubnoff?"

"Yes."

"Tell me; how did the child get into the Bubnoffs' hands? Did her mother die here?"

"Oh, she got here somehow," said the woman, evidently wishing to be rid of me. "It's not my business, and I don't meddle with other people's."

"But can't you help me? I really think I might do something for her. Who *is* the child? Who was her mother?"

"Some foreigner. She lived down below with us here; a sickly sort of woman. She died of consumption."

"Then I may gather that she was dreadfully poor, since she lived in a corner of a cellar like that?"

"Poor, I should think so! One's heart ached to see her. We are not much better off ourselves; but she died owing us five months' expenses. We buried her too; my husband made the coffin." |

"Why, Mrs. Bubnoff was just saying that *she* had buried the poor woman."

"That's all a lie."

"What was her name?"

"Oh, something unpronounceable. German, I should think."

"Smith, was it?"

"No; I don't think it was that. Well, Mrs. Bubnoff took the orphan to bring her up, she said; but it's a bad business."

"I suppose she has some object in view in taking the girl?"

"She may have; but if so— Well, it's pretty sure to be a *bad* object."

She spoke slowly and thoughtfully, and with hesitation, and went on—

"I don't know whether I ought to talk like this; it's no affair of mine; we are outsiders."

"You had better shut your mouth now," said a man's voice behind her at this moment. The voice belonged to an elderly man in a dressing-gown with a Russian kaftán over it. This was my friend's husband, evidently.

"It's best not to talk about these sort of things," he said, looking askance at me. "You go in," he continued, to his spouse. "Good morning, sir!" he added to me. "We are coffin makers, and if you want anything in that line I am very much at your service; otherwise, I don't quite see that we can do much good by going on with this conversation."

I took the hint, and left the house, much agitated. I could not see any way of helping Helen, and yet I felt it intolerable to leave the child thus. Some of my informant's words troubled me deeply. I felt sure that there was foul play of some sort going on; of this I was convinced.

However, I went slowly away, head bent, a prey to disquieting thoughts, when suddenly a loud voice calling my name, roused me from my reverie. I looked up and saw a tipsy-looking individual standing before me, fairly well dressed, but with a wretched greasy cap on his head. His face seemed very familiar. I observed him closely. He winked and smiled in a tipsy, ironical manner.

"Well, don't you know me?" he said.

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## CHAPTER V.

"WHY, it's Maslobóeff!" I cried, suddenly recognising an old school friend. "Well, this *is* an unexpected pleasure!"

"Pleasure! I should think so. We haven't had this same pleasure for six years. We have met occasionally, of course, but your worship has not condescended to recognise me, naturally. Why, you're a general now—a literary general!" He pronounced this last sentence with a smile of exquisite derision.

"Now, my good fellow," I answered, "don't be an ass! In the first place, generals—literary or other—don't come out walking in this sort of guise. And in the second place, if you'll excuse my mentioning it, on the two occasions when I



have had the honour of seeing you in the streets, it was yourself who avoided me ; and what's more, you made this so clear, that I could do nothing else but let you alone. And what is *still* more—I'll tell you frankly what I think—if you were not half-seas-over at this moment, you would have cut me again ; wouldn't you now ? All the same, I'm more than delighted to meet you ! ”

“ Is that true, old boy ? Don't I rather compromise your respectability with my—well, not quite *comme il faut* condition ? No ! Well, let's let it alone, Vánia. I tell you what, I always think of you as one of the best fellows I ever knew. Why, don't you remember getting birched instead of me, one day ? You wouldn't say a word, and wouldn't sneak about me, and instead of being grateful, I laughed at you for it. Why, you're a rare old fellow, Vánia ! And how are you, old chap ? ” Here we kissed each other in true Russian style. “ I don't forget my old friends, and don't make new ones. ”

He gazed in my face in the feeble way that a half-tipsy man *does* gaze. I was sorry to see his condition, for Maslobóeff was always a capital good fellow.

“ Look here, Vánia ; let's have a chat, ” he said. “ Are you in a hurry ? ”

“ Well, yes I am ; I am dreadfully worried about something. ” I said. “ But I'll tell you what I'll do. Look here ! where do you live ? ”

“ You shall have my address. But let me tell you what's better still. Look up there ! ” He pointed to a signboard on the wall of a house a few yards off. “ Look—restaurant ! I know it, and it's a good one. My dear boy, the *rodki* there—unspeakable ! I know it, for I've drunk gallons of it. They know Philip Philipovitch ! They daren't serve him up anything but the real article. Well, what does that face mean ? Look here, let me speak now ; it's just a quarter past eleven ; at five and twenty minutes to twelve you shall be free to go. There ! you don't grudge twenty little minutes for a chat with an old friend ? ”

I agreed to the twenty minutes, and we went up the dirty wooden stairs to the second floor. On the stairs we met two men ; one a flashy youngster with valuable rings and scarf-pin, the other an elderly, stout, coarse-looking man, who saluted Maslobóeff as we passed, and informed him that Mitroshka was upstairs. On entering the coffee-room, at one end of

which was a long counter covered with meat pies, radishes, and a host of light refreshments, together with decanters containing every conceivable variety of wine and spirit, Maslobóeff hurried me through to the far corner, where we sat down. My companion pointed out Mitroshka.

"There he is," he said, "standing at the window, that gipsy-looking fellow; he's a horse dealer and knows all the gentry about here. That man, sir, will manufacture a rouble note under your eyes, and you'll take it as a good one the minute after. You may put him into a frock coat and take him to the yacht-club as Count Barabanoff, and he'll play whist with the swells for a couple of hours, and be the best count there. Mitroshka is at daggers drawn with the fat old fellow we met, because the fat man snapped that other young chap out of Mitroshka's hands before Mitroshka had time to squeeze him dry (he had money left him). I don't want Mitroshka to see me, Vánia. Don't you stare at him. Here, let's go into this next room. Now then, Stepán!" he said to the waiter, "of course, you know what I want?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"And you intend to satisfy me, do you?"

"I do, sir."

"Off you go, then. Sit down, Vánia. How you stare at me, Vánia; what is it? Do I surprise you? Never be surprised at anything! Men must change you know, and perhaps I *am* changed since we read 'Cornelius Nepos' together. But believe one thing, Vánia. Maslobóeff may perhaps have gone astray a bit now and then, but his heart is all right, my boy, though circumstances are different. I thought of going in for doctoring once, but it fell through; then I tried tutoring, and didn't like that; then I wrote a treatise on Gogol; then I thought of setting up as a jeweller; then I thought I would marry money, and it nearly came off; and now I'm nobody's servant, and yet I make money. I am a supporter of the law and a taker of fees, and I'm *well* in, *well* in with my work, Vánia. I have a large connection in a mysterious legal direction. Do you see?"

"Secret police, I suppose?"

"Not exactly that. My work is private as well as official. I'll tell you what my principal business is, Vánia—drinking. I never drink my wits away, I'm all right there. But I'm afraid I'm a poor lot, Vánia. You can't wash a black horse

white. You were right just now Vánia. I have often wanted to come up and speak to you, but never dared. I should not have dared to-day, but that I was tipsy. You were quite right. Now, let's talk about you. I've read it, my boy; I've read it! Your book, I mean. Eh, man, and *how* I read it! I very nearly became a respectable fellow straight off, touch and go, I assure you; but I thought it all over, and decided that I had better remain a blackguard after all."

And so he maundered on, getting more and more under the influence of the drink he took.

Poor Maslobóeff! he was always a good fellow, but terribly weak. He was a cunning, sly character, even at school; but he had a generous heart. A good man lost to the world. There are many Russians of this type; men of excellent capabilities, who ruin themselves deliberately and against their own sense and self-respect, purely out of weakness to resist certain temptations. And they not only inevitably ruin themselves, but will tell you long before their ruin that they see it approaching. Maslobóeff was drowning his soul in liquor.

"Just one more word, Vánia," he went on, "I read your book and several reviews upon it (you think I don't read anything, but I really did), after which I met you in the streets in wretched boots and a caved-in hat. What are you working at now?"

"Journalism."

"Oh, that's what I call being a post-horse. Well, all I can say is, I like drinking better. Look at me now! I have a good drink and then go home and lie down on my sofa (it's a good one too, on springs); and there I lie and dream, and fancy myself some Homer or Dante. Now *you* can't imagine yourself Dante or Homer or anybody else; firstly, because you want to be a fellow like that yourself; and secondly, because post-horses mustn't have fancies. Now look here, candidly and frankly, and like a brother, listen to me; don't you want some money? I've got it, you know. None of your faces, now! Take the money, settle with your employers, take off your harness, and go and have a quiet year of peace and life—somewhere—and *then* write! See what the grand result will be! There! What do you say to that!"

"Listen, Maslobóeff, old fellow; I value your brotherly offer deeply; but—I can't say anything just now; there are circumstances—it's a long business, but I promise to tell

you all about it another time! Thanks, old boy, thanks very much! and I'll come and see you—often! Look here, there's one thing—you have been very open with me, so I will just ask your advice about it, especially as you are an expert in this sort of business," and I told him the whole history of old Smith and his grandchild, beginning at the scene in the confectioner's shop.

Strangely enough, as I went on I could see by his eyes that he knew something about it. I enquired if this was so.

"Well, I didn't know much about Smith," he said, "except in so far that I knew an old man had died in a restaurant; but as to Mrs. Bubnoff, I certainly do happen to know something! I got a fee from her a month or two ago! You see, '*Je prends mon bien où je le trouve!*' I'm like Molière for once! But she cheated me, and I vowed to get my due out of her some day. She's a bad woman, the worst sort; and her business is—well, unspeakable! You must not think me a Don Quixote; but I don't like that sort of thing. However, I am very glad you told me all about this; it has given me an idea. I take up all sorts of private enquiries, you know; and get to know the most extraordinary mixture of people. I had a little job on behalf of a prince, the other day. Well, all I can say is, I shouldn't have thought it of the prince! I could tell you a strange tale or two, Vánia. You come to me and I'll give you such subjects for your novels that you'll make your readers skip with astonishment."

"What was your prince's name?" I asked, with a feeling that something curious was about to be revealed.

"And what do you want to know *that* for? I'll tell you, though, if you like, Valkofski."

"Peter?"

"Yes, why? do you know him?"

"A little, not much! but—. Look here, Maslobóeff, if you don't mind I shall very likely come and see you very often about this gentleman. You have interested me in the highest degree."

"Come along, old fellow, by all means! I can tell stories as well as most people, but within limits, you know—honour-bound, and that sort of thing."

"Of course, fair play and strict honour. You needn't tell me more than you ought." I was intensely agitated, and he saw it.

"Maslobóeff," I continued, "have you any advice to give me as to the history I told you?"

"Your history! wait a minute and I'll tell you?"

He went over to the counter, and there, as though accidentally, entered into conversation with the man whom he had pointed out to me as Mitroshka. He seemed to be far more intimate with this gentleman than was to be gathered from his previous remarks. After a while he came back to me.

"Look here, Vánia," he said, "come and see me at seven this evening. Very likely, I may have something to tell you. You see I'm not much use to you *alone*. I *was* a useful sort of fellow not long ago; but just now I have had very little professional practice, and have studied the science of drinking more. However, I have my old connections, and I can do a good deal of snuffing about with their help; not that I am not a pretty good hand myself, if I choose an opportune, that is a sober, moment for my work. Well, well, here's my address, old boy; I live in the Shestilávochnaya. Just now I'm a little too far gone for anything like work. One more glass, and then home. I shall lie down till you come; mind and be punctual! You shall make Alexandra Semeónovna's acquaintance, and we shall have time for a talk about poetry, you know."

"And how about the other thing?"

"Oh, we'll fit that in, too!"

"All right, I'll be sure to come," I said; and we parted.

## CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I got to the Ikméniefs' I found that the old lady had been expecting me for a long while. What I had told her yesterday about Natásha's urgent note to me had raised her curiosity painfully, and she had been waiting anxiously for me ever since ten. When I did come, at about two, the torment of expectation had brought the poor old lady to the verge of despair. Besides this, she longed to tell me of the new hopes which had arisen in her breast since the day before, and about old Ikménief, who, though he had been morose and ill, had become much more tender and kind to

wards herself. She was so angry with me for coming late, when I did turn up, that I thought she would have asked me coldly what I had come for, or something of that sort, she looked so stern and unconcerned as to what I had to tell her; but I hastened to report the whole scene at Natásha's lodging without preface. No sooner did the old lady hear of the prince's visit, and of his solemn proposal for Natásha's hand, than away went all her accumulated spleen and temper. Words fail me to describe her joy. She seemed to lose her wits; she cried, and crossed herself again and again; she knelt before her ikon in the corner, and touched the ground with her forehead; she embraced me, and wanted to rush off to the old gentleman to tell him the joyful news.

"Why, bless you, my boy," she said, "he is naturally angry at all the humiliations and insults that have been heaped upon him of late; but when he hears that Natásha is to have her rights and be made happy, he'll forget it all in the twinkling of an eye."

I had the greatest difficulty in dissuading her. Good old lady! in spite of the fact that she had been married to him twenty-five years, she did not know her husband as I did.

Then, again, she wanted to go straight off to Natásha with me. I pointed out that Ikménief would not only disapprove of her action, but that we should very likely spoil the whole thing. She had great difficulty in understanding this patent fact, and she kept me half an hour beyond my time, the only words she could find to say during the entire period being—

"How am I to sit alone here, between these four walls, with my heart so full of joy!"

At last I persuaded her to let me go, by representing to her that Natásha would be anxious to see me. The good old lady blessed and crossed me several times, sent her blessing specially to Natásha, and nearly cried when I refused to come again the same day, unless anything particular happened in connection with Natásha.

I did not see old Ikménief this time; he had not slept all night from feverish headache, and was now taking a siesta in his study.

I found that Natásha had also expected me all the morning. When I came in she was walking up and down the room as usual, deep in thought. Even now, whenever I think of her, as at this period, I see the picture of a lone girl walking up

and down, up and down, in a shabby room, thoughtful, deserted, waiting, expecting—her hands folded together, her eyes on the ground, and always aimlessly walking up and down, up and down!

She quietly asked me (still walking up and down) why I came so late. I told her all my adventures; but she hardly listened. It was evident that she was much preoccupied!

“What is there new?” I asked.

“There is nothing new,” she said, but with an expression which satisfied me that there *was* something new, and that she had been waiting for me on purpose to tell me; but that, as usual, she would not say a word about it until the very moment when I got up to go away. So I simply waited.

We talked about yesterday's episode. What struck me especially was that our ideas as to the prince were so strangely alike. Evidently she did not like him to-day, she disliked him more to-day than she had the day before. And, when we went through the details of his visit of the past evening, Natásha suddenly said—

“You know, Vánia, it's a sure sign—it always is so—if you don't like a man at first, that you will get to like him afterwards. At all events, it is always like that with me.”

“God grant it be so, Natásha!” I said. “My opinion is, and I have gone carefully through the whole matter, that though the prince may be a regular Jesuit, and all that, yet he has certainly consented to your marriage, truly and seriously.”

Natásha stopped in the midst of her walk and looked at me suddenly, with an expression of hardness on her face; her very lips were trembling.

“Vánia!” she said, “how *could* a man begin to deceive and *lie* under circumstances like these?” She spoke haughtily, but as though the question perplexed her.

“Of course, of course!” I hastened to remark.

“Yes, of course! He *could* not have been lying; it is an absurd idea to suppose it for a moment. Why, why should he? To what purpose could he try to deceive us now? Besides, what should he take me for to think of making such a mockery of me as that would amount to? Surely no man exists who could do such a cruel act as that!”

“Of course, of course!” I agreed; but I said to myself. “You think of nothing else, all the same, my poor, dear little girl, as you walk up and down here all alone; and, if the truth

were known, you probably suspect the prince even more than I do."

"I wish he would come back!" she said. "He must have very important business, to drop everything here and go away! Do you know anything about his business, Vánia?"

"Not I! Probably he is making money, somehow. He always is; but that is not *our* affair, Natásha!"

"Of course, not; but Aleósha spoke of some letter yesterday."

"Well, it may be that! Has Aleósha been?"

"Oh, yes."

"Early?"

"He came at twelve; he gets up late, you know. He sat for a time, and then I sent him off to see Kátia. I thought I ought to do that, Vánia."

"Didn't he want to go of himself?"

"Oh, yes—"

She was going to add something but stopped; I looked at her, and waited. Her face was sad, and I longed to ask her what was the matter, but I knew she didn't like questions.

"Oh! he's such a strange boy—a *strange* boy!" she said at last with one side of her mouth slightly drawn up, and evidently trying not to look at me.

"Why?" I asked. "Was there anything particular at your interview to-day?"

"Oh, no! nothing at all; just *so*. He was very nice to me, but—"

"Oh! well," I said, "all his troubles and anxieties are at an end now."

She looked earnestly at me, as if she would have said, "uncommonly little trouble or anxiety *he* ever allowed himself to suffer." But she saw that I was thinking the same thing, and said nothing.

Natásha was very sweet and pretty this afternoon, although she was evidently much disturbed. She and I sat and talked for an hour or more. The prince's visit had frightened her a good deal; and I could see from her questions that she was longing to know what sort of impression she had made upon the prince. Had not she shown her joy too unmistakeably? Had not she put on too much of an offended air? or was she too much the other way—too complaisant? What did he



think of her? did he despise her? At this last thought her cheeks flushed a fiery colour.

"Oh, Natásha!" I said, "fancy exciting yourself so much over impossible conjectures as to what a bad man like that may think about you; let him think what he likes."

"Why do you call him a bad man?" she asked.

I did not answer. I said I was in a hurry, and must go. Natásha nearly cried when I rose up to depart, although I had hardly had a kind word from her the whole while I had been with her; in fact, she had been colder than usual towards me. She kissed me and looked long and fixedly into my eyes.

"Listen, Vánia," she said at last, "Aleósha was so funny to-day, I was quite surprised; he was as kind and nice as possible, but he behaved like a butterfly the whole while, and hardly did anything but look in the glass. He didn't stop long. Fancy! he brought me a box of bonbons."

"Bonbons! why not? It just shows what a simple kind-hearted fellow he is. Oh, you two, you two!" I exclaimed, "what a couple of babies you are, to be sure! What possesses you now to indulge in all this absurd suspicion, and to attribute all sorts of secret thoughts to each other, for which there is not the shadow of a reason? He's not so bad; he is, and always will be, a jolly schoolboy; but you Natásha! oh, Natásha!"

I often noticed about Natásha, when she came to me with some complaint about Aleósha, or with some momentous question to be decided, that she would look at me with parted lips and wistful eyes, as though entreating me to answer her in such a manner that her anxiety might be soothed at once; but that I invariably replied in a cutting, harsh tone of voice, as though scolding her; and, that though I put on this tone quite unconsciously and accidentally, yet it always succeeded. My austerity seemed to carry a special weight of authority, and in point of fact it is the case that many people feel at times an irresistible longing to be pitched into by somebody else. At all events Natásha used to leave me quite pacified after such a little lecture as I would give her.

"No, Vánia," she continued, putting one hand on my shoulder and holding my hand with the other, "he seemed to me to-day to be acting the 'married man,' you know—a man who has been married ten years, and still finds himself able to be indulgent and kind to his wife. Isn't it rather early in the day

to begin that sort of thing? He laughed and pirouetted about in such a funny way, behaving not in the least as he used to; then he was in a great hurry to go and see Kátia. I spoke to him and he didn't listen, or talked about something else—you know that bad society habit which we have tried so hard to break him of—in a word, he seemed to me so indifferent; while I was— There, Vánia! there I go! always exacting and despotic. You were quite right just now, Vánia, when you scolded me. I am to blame, as usual; imagining griefs and then complaining of them! Thanks, Vánia, you have done me good. Oh, I *wish* he would come here again to-day, and yet, perhaps he is angry with me about this morning's visit."

"Why, you don't mean to say you have quarrelled with him?" I asked, with astonishment.

"Oh, no! but I think I was a little cross, and he suddenly became grave and thoughtful immediately after having been so jolly. I thought he was rather cold when he said good-bye to me. I tell you what, I'll send for him; you come too, Vánia, this evening"

"Certainly; unless I am detained by a certain business."

"Oh, no! what business could detain you, Vánia?"

"Well, I'll see; probably I will come," I said.

## CHAPTER VII.

AT seven o'clock, punctually, I arrived at Maslobóeff's house. He lived in the Shestilávochnaya, in a small house, where he occupied three untidy-looking rooms, not badly furnished, however. There was evidence of a certain opulence in the place, but of no order. The door was opened for me by a pretty little woman, simply but tastefully dressed; she had kind and, at the same time, lively eyes, and did not look more than about nineteen years old. This must be Alexandra Semeónovna, I thought, the wife of whom Maslobóeff had told me. She asked my name, and, upon hearing it, said that her husband was expecting me, and was lying down in his study. I went there, and found Maslobóeff asleep on a Turkish divan,

a very fine piece of furniture, covered with a dirty-looking cloak, and with a leather cushion under his head. He started up, and called to me by name, the instant I appeared.

"Ah!" he said, "here you are. I was just dreaming that you had come to wake me up. Come along; we must go. It's time!"

"Go where to?"

"To see a lady! Mrs. Bubnoff. *Such* a lady too!" he went on, turning to Alexandra. "Oh! a *lovely* woman," and he kissed the tips of his fingers in affected rapture at the memory of Mrs. Bubnoff.

"Go along," said Alexandra, who felt it incumbent upon her to feel a little angry.

"Do you know my wife?" Maslobóeff asked.

"Alexandra, let me introduce this literary general. One can only see them for nothing once a year. On all other occasions you have to pay."

"Oh, do stop!" Alexandra said. "You mustn't listen to him; he's always laughing at me. *What* sort of a general?" she continued.

"I was just telling you; a *special* kind—he is! Your excellency," he went on to me, "you mustn't suppose that we are so stupid as we appear. We are very clever people really, I assure you!"

"Don't listen to him," Alexandra cut in; "he always shows off before strangers. I wish he would take me out sometimes."

"Alexandra," said her husband, "you must love your domestic—Have you forgotten the word I taught you, domestic what?"

"Of course I haven't forgotten, but it means some rubbish or other."

"Well, let's hear the word then; go on, what was it?"

"I *won't* say it. I believe you are playing some trick on me. It means something horrid, I'm sure. You want to make me blush before our guest."

"Ah! you've forgotten it!"

"No I haven't then! Penates! 'Love your penates!' That's what you said, and I don't believe there are such things as penates. You will have your little joke. It's a very bad one, I can tell you. It's a lie; that's what it is!"

"Oh, indeed! Then I shall go and see Mrs. Bubnoff. Come on, Vánia. Good-bye, Alexandra!"

But poor Alexandra, who didn't like being chaffed, had run away in indignation.

We went out, and took the first droshky we could find. Maslobóeff informed me, as we drove along, that he had made certain arrangements, with Mitroshka's help, by which he hoped to effect Helen's rescue from Mrs. Bubnoff's—whose establishment had long been known as "suspicious," and as to which Maslobóeff related certain details which were enough to cause me the greatest anxiety on Helen's account. The first move in Maslobóeff's plan of proceedings was for us to go to Mrs. Bubnoff's restaurant, and thither we now made our way.

"Will they let us in, though?" I asked.

"Of course they will, as guests," Maslobóeff replied. "She knows me, and she knows Mitroshka, and won't suspect our intentions."

As soon as we reached the gate (after we had joined Mitroshka) the dvornik winked at the latter and let us in. We left our droshky with instructions to be ready for us, and entered. Mrs. Bubnoff, looking dishevelled and half tipsy, opened the door to us, candle in hand, and welcomed us. She showed us into a room, however, which Maslobóeff would not hear of having.

"No, no!" he said, "we want a better reception than this. Get us some iced champagne, and show us another room. Look here," he added, "is Sizibruchoff here?"

"Yes."

"The young villain! How dared he come here before me?" he said.

"Very likely he is waiting for you," said Mrs. Bubnoff. "He seems to be expecting somebody."

Mitroshka stayed outside, and we went into another room where we found the young fellow referred to as Sizibruchoff, sitting at a small table with a lady friend, and some champagne and sweet biscuits and bonbons before them.

"Philip Philipovitch, I am delighted to see you," he said, coming forward with a tipsily happy expression of face. Sizibruchoff introduced us to the lady who was seated at the table with him, and who informed us that he had just been telling her of his visit to Paris."

"He was just about to tell me how he broke a pier-glass at a restaurant there," she said.

"How was that?" we asked.

"Well, I was then with Karp Vasilitch," he said; "and Karp Vasilitch was so drunk that he insisted on talking Russian to the proprietor. Karp was standing alongside of a great long English pier-glass, and cannoned up against it. Joubert, the proprietor, called out, 'That glass cost me seven hundred francs; look out, or you'll be having it over!' Karp Vasilitch looked across at me and called out, 'I say, Sizibruchoff, shall we go halves, eh?'"

"'Done! with you,' I said.

"No sooner had I said the word, than *bang* went his great fist against the glass, and crash went the whole thing on the ground.

"'What the blazes are you about, you scoundrel?' yelled Joubert, making for his face.

"'My dear sir,' said Karp Vasilitch, 'never mind about scratching my face, but take your money while you can get it,' and with that he whipped out six hundred and fifty francs, and paid him down on the nail. We got off the other fifty francs."

Just at this moment there was a fearful shriek some rooms off. I knew the voice; it was Helen's! A moment after there were other cries, and the sound of quarrelling and blows—Mitroshka's voice and another's. Suddenly the door burst open, and in rushed Helen, her hair dishevelled; her muslin dress—the one we have heard of as being a special detestation of hers—torn and crushed, and her eyes blazing with a subdued fire. I was standing opposite the door by which she entered, and she rushed straight up to me and encircled me with her arms.

Everyone jumped up at the apparition.

"Look here, Vánia," said Maslobóeff, coming calmly up to me and clapping me on the shoulder, just take the droshky and drive straight home with the child. You have nothing more to do here. We'll see about the rest of this business to-morrow, if there be anything more to see after."

I did not wait for a second bidding. Seizing Helen by the hand I rushed away, dragging her after me. No one stopped us. Mrs. Bubnoff was evidently under the influence of terror, it had all happened so suddenly that she had not collected her wits. The droshky was ready, and twenty minutes later we were safe at my house.

Helen was in a semi-conscious state. I loosened the hooks of her dress at the neck, sprinkled her face with water, and laid her down on my sofa-bed. She was feverish, and began to wander. I looked at her pale little face and her colourless lips. I gazed at her dishevelled hair, which had evidently been carefully combed; however, and on her torn muslin dress. And as I gazed I realised more and more the dreadful nature of the home, and the awful perils out of which I had brought her. Poor little thing! she became worse and worse. I could not leave her, and decided not to go to Natásha's this evening. Now and then Helen raised her long eyelashes and looked at me long and fixedly, as though trying to recognise who I was. She fell asleep late, between one and two o'clock, and I lay down on the floor by her side.

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## CHAPTER VIII.

I AROSE very early. All the night I had kept waking up nearly every half-hour, and each time I went to my poor little guest and carefully observed her. She was feverish and slightly delirious; but towards morning she fell into a sound sleep. That's a good sign, I thought; but all the same, I determined that while the poor little thing still slept I would run for the doctor. I knew a doctor, a kind-hearted old bachelor who had lived in the Vladmirsky from time immemorial, all alone with his German housekeeper. I ran off to him and obtained his promise to come in at ten o'clock; it was eight when I arrived there, and I felt that I should like to call at Maslobóeff's on the way home; but I reflected that Helen might wake up, and be alarmed at finding herself alone and at my lodging; in her present state she might well have forgotten how, and under what circumstances, she had come there.

She awoke at the very moment that I came in. I went up to her, and very quietly enquired how she felt? She did not answer, but stared long and fixedly at me with her large expressive black eyes. She looked as though her head were all right, and as though she understood clearly; so I assumed that she did not answer merely from her habit of silence. She had

always been like this, staring obstinately at one instead of answering, each time I had seen her. Besides obstinacy, there was a certain pride in her gaze, mingled with a strange curiosity of expression, together with a look of austerity and incredulity. I wanted to put my hand upon her forehead to feel whether she had any fever, but she quietly and silently took my hand with her own little hand, and put it aside, turning her face to the wall at the same time. I went away from her bedside, so as not to worry her further.

I had a large brass kettle which I had long used, instead of a tea-urn, for boiling my water in. I had also a stock of wood handy, the *dvornik* having brought in a quantity to last about five days. I put the water on to boil, on a hastily made fire, and got my tea-things ready on the table; Helen turned round and watched the whole operation with great curiosity. I asked her whether she wanted anything; but she turned away once more and said nothing. "I wonder what she is angry with me about," I thought, "strange little girl."

My old doctor turned up, as promised, at ten o'clock. He carefully examined the little patient, with real German attention, and assured me that, though she was a little feverish, there was no particular danger about her condition. He added that she probably suffered from some continual malady, something connected with the heart's action, he thought, which point would require special attention afterwards; at present she was not in any danger. He wrote a prescription for her—mixture and powders; and then put all sorts of questions to me, as to how she came to be here, and so on.

Helen had struck him very much; she had pushed his hand away when he wanted to feel her pulse, and would not show her tongue. She would not answer a word to all his questions, but she stared fixedly the whole time at the large order of St. Stanislas hanging at his neck.

"Probably her head aches badly," he said; "and, good gracious, how the child stares!"

I did not think it necessary to tell him all about Helen; I said it was too long a history for the present.

"Let me know if you want me," he said as he went out; "at present there is no danger."

I determined to stay with Helen all day, if possible until she was quite well again, leaving her alone as seldom as possible. But as I knew that *Natasha* and *Madame Ikménief* would pro-

bably be put out if I did not turn up, I resolved to send Natásha a note saying I could not come to-day. I could not write to the old lady. She had asked me never to do so, on one occasion when I had written during Natásha's illness.

"My old husband frowns so," she had said, "when he sees your letter. He longs to know what it is about, but does not like to ask; and so he is in a bad humour for the rest of the day. So you don't do me much good with your letters, my boy; besides, what's the use of ten lines or so? I always long to know more, and you are not there to ask."

So I only wrote to Natásha, and posted it on my way to the apothecary's.

While I was away Helen fell asleep again. She moaned a little when I returned, and trembled. Then, she awoke after a time with a little cry, and looked at me as though with dislike—as though the associations with my appearance were painful to her. I confess that this hurt me a good deal.

Maslobóeff came at eleven. He was much preoccupied, and was in a great hurry to go somewhere, so that he only stayed a minute.

"Well, old fellow," he said, "I guessed you didn't live in style; but I never thought I should find you in such a hole as this. Why, this is a *trunk*, not a lodging. You can't *write*, you know, in a place like this. Now look here, this won't do. You must come and see me next Sunday morning, and we'll talk it over logically. You can't go on like this. Surely you wouldn't think it any dishonour to borrow a little money from me?"

"Oh, never mind about me," I said. "Tell me how it all ended at Bubnoff's last night?"

"Quite right, of course; and you achieved your end. What else do you want? I haven't time to go into it all now; but I just came in to find out what you intend to do with the child? Shall you place her somewhere, or keep her here, or what? We must make up our minds as to this point at once."

"I hardly know yet what to do. I was waiting to talk it over with yourself. Could I keep her here on some pretext, do you think?"

"Of course; why not? Keep her as your servant."

"Do talk rather less noisily, my dear fellow. Though she is ill, she has all her wits about her. When you came in I saw



her shudder perceptibly. She evidently connected you with yesterday somehow."

I proceeded to tell Maslobóeff all I knew about this child and her character. He was very much interested. I added that I had hopes of getting her into a house where I was known and told him all about my Ikménief friends. To my unbounded astonishment he was acquainted with most of Natásha's history; and when I asked him how on earth he happened to know *that?* he said—

"Oh, one picks up these things by bits somehow. It fits in to another little affair I have had to do with. I told you that I knew Prince Valkofski. You are quite right to send her to the Ikméniefs if you can. There's no room for both of you here. Then we mustn't forget that she must be got up respectably. Just leave that part of the business to me; I'll look after it. Good-bye now, old boy. Come in and see us as often as you can. Is she asleep now?"

"I think so," I said.

But scarcely had he gone out when Helen beckoned to me.

"Who's that?" she asked. Her voice shook; but she looked at me with the same fixity and laughtiness of expression. I cannot describe it more clearly than by these words.

I told her Maslobóeff's name, and added that it was through him I had been able to get her away from Bubnoff's. I added that Bubnoff was very much afraid of Maslobóeff. Her cheeks flushed at my words, probably at the recollection which Bubnoff's name conjured up.

"She will never come here, will she?" she asked anxiously.

I hastened to reassure her. She was silent and took my hand in hers for a moment, but as suddenly dropped it, apparently recollecting herself.

"She cannot possibly feel any dislike for me," I thought. "This is simply her manner; or, perhaps, the poor little thing has seen so much grief and cruelty that she cannot as yet believe in anyone or anything."

At the time appointed I went to the chemist's, and also to an eating-house where I was known and had a credit. I took a basin with me, and brought back some chicken broth for poor Helen; but she would not eat it, and I had to put it on the stove to keep it warm. Having given her her medicine, I settled down to my work. I thought she went to sleep, now; but looking up accidentally, a few moments later, I saw that she

was watching me writing, evidently much interested ; I pretended not to notice her and went on. She soon fell asleep in real earnest, and, to my great satisfaction, without any delirium or moaning. I fell into a reverie.

"Natasha," I thought, "will be angry with me for not coming ; not only that, she will feel hurt that I should seem to feel no interest in her affairs just at this critical time, and I may be most necessary to her to-day ; who knows ? She may be having all sorts of worries and some question to decide, rendering my presence most essential, and here I am, not available." As for Madame Ikménief, I had not the slightest idea how I should ever dare to face her to-morrow, and, as I turned the matter over and over in my mind, I suddenly determined to run off and see them both and be back in a couple of hours.

Helen was asleep, she would not hear me go out. I jumped up, took my coat and hat, and was just leaving, when suddenly Helen called me. I was much surprised ; surely she had not been pretending to be asleep. I may mention here that I liked to see that Helen, although she spoke so little, now seemed to call me to her side more frequently, and to turn to me for explanation when anything puzzled her.

"Where are you going to send me to ?" she asked, when I came up to her bedside. She always asked her questions in so sharp and sudden a manner that she surprised me ; this time I hardly knew what to answer. I didn't realise what she was referring to.

"You were talking to your friend just now, and saying that you wanted to send me to some house. I won't go anywhere."

I bent over her ; she was very feverish again. I did all I could to soothe and reassure her, and told her that if she preferred to remain with me I should certainly not send her anywhere. While saying this I took my hat and coat off again ; I could not leave her in this condition.

"No, no," she said, seeing at once that I wanted to stay for her sake. "No, no, I wish to go to sleep ; I shall be asleep in a minute."

"But how are you to stay all alone ?" I said dubiously. "Of course, I should be back in a couple of hours," I added, "but—"

"Go, of course," she said. "Why, if I am to be ill for a year, you'll have to stay at home for a year, at that rate."

She tried to smile, and looked very strangely at me, as though struggling with some kind of sentiment which had arisen in her

heart, poor little thing ! Her poor tender heart was peeping out of the mist of misanthropy and obduracy that environed her.

I went first to the Ikméniefs'. The old lady was waiting for me in a state of feverish expectancy, and met me with reproaches. She was much disturbed. Ikménief had gone out immediately after dinner, she did not know where to. I felt sure that she had told the old gentleman everything that I had related to her, in her own special way, by a series of hints ; in fact, she confessed as much, telling me that she had not found it possible to abstain from sharing her great joy with her husband ; but that Ikménief had got "blacker than a cloud," and had not said a word ; had not even answered her questions, and immediately after dinner had gone out.

She told me all this with the greatest signs of anxiety, and begged me to stay with her until Ikménief came back. I told her almost coldly that I could not, and that I should probably not see her next day, and that I had now come principally to tell her this. We very nearly quarrelled this time. She cried, reproached me bitterly, and only when I was on the doorstep she suddenly fell on my neck, embraced me with both arms and told me not to be angry with her, nor to take offence at anything she had said.

I found Natásha alone, contrary to my expectations, and she seemed less glad than usual to see me ; it appeared to me that I was almost in the way. To my question as to whether Aleósha had been, she replied—

"Of course he has, but not for long. He promised to come in the evening ;" she spoke, as if in a reverie.

"Was he here last evening ?"

"No—no, he was kept !" she said hurriedly. "Well, Vánia, and how goes it with you ?"

I saw that she was trying to change the subject ; and when I looked fixedly at her, it was clear that she was unquestionably agitated. She observed me watching her, and turned such a sharp gaze upon me, that one might have fancied she wanted to burn me up with it. "She has got some new trouble," I thought, "but she doesn't want to tell me about it yet."

I told her the whole story of little Helen, by way of answer to her question about my affairs. My story interested her very much ; she seemed greatly struck.

"Good heavens !" she said, "and you could leave her like that, alone and ill ?"

I explained that I had wished to stay at home, but had been afraid of offending her (Natasha), and, besides, I thought she might want me."

"Want you," she said, musingly, "perhaps I *do* want you ; but it will do another time. Have you been to see *them*?"

I told her of my visit to her mother.

"Yes," she said, "God only knows how my father will take the news, and yet after all, what news is there?"

"How, what news?" I asked. Here was a sudden change with a vengeance.

"Oh, just so, never mind ! Where can my father have gone to, I wonder ! Last time you thought he was coming here. Vania," she went on, "look here, come in to-morrow morning, if you can. Perhaps I shall have something to tell you. The only thing is, I don't like taking up your time now, for you must look after your little guest. You have been away your two hours, haven't you?"

"Yes," I said, "good-bye, Natasha ; but first of all, just tell me this, what was Aleósha like to-day?"

"Oh, never mind Aleósha. I really am quite surprised at your inquisitiveness, Vania."

"Good-bye then, dear."

She gave me her hand carelessly, and turned her face away from my parting look.

I came away deeply astonished ; she evidently had something very serious on her mind. "She will tell me all about it to-morrow," I said.

I rushed home with a heavy heart, and found the room in darkness. On peering for Helen, I saw her sitting on the bed with her head bent down upon her breast, as though she were wrapt in thought. She did not so much as glance at me, as if she had forgotten my existence. I came up to her, and found her muttering something to herself. "Is it delirium again?" I thought.

"Helen, little one," I said, "what is the matter?" I sat down by her and took her hand.

"I want to go away ; I had better go back to *her*," she said, without raising her head.

"Where to ? to *whom* ?" I asked, wondering.

"To her, to Bubnoff's. She is always telling me that I owe her a great deal of money, and that she buried mother at her own cost ; and I don't want her to say nasty things about

mother. I want to work off my debt to her, and I *will* work till I do ; and when I've paid all the money I owe her, then I'll go away. Now, I must go back to her."

"Calm yourself, dear child," I said, "you can't go back, it's impossible. She will kill you before she's done with you."

"Let her kill me, let her do what she likes with me!" Helen interposed, hotly. "Better people than me have been bullied and killed ; a beggar in the streets told me that. I am poor, and I want to be poor all my life. Mother told me I must be poor when she died. I shall work ! I don't want to wear this dress."

"You shall have another to-morrow ; I'll buy you one, and I'll get you your books. You shall live here with me. I won't give you away to anyone, unless you want to go yourself ; only be quiet now, dear, and--"

"I shall go out as a dressmaker."

"Very well, all right, little one ; only don't talk now. Try to go to sleep."

But the poor child burst into tears ; the tears gradually turned to sobbing. I didn't know what to do with her. I bathed her face with water, and still she went on sobbing piteously. At last she fell back on the sofa, quite worn out and in a high fever again. I covered her over with the first thing I could find, and she fell asleep once more, but it was a troubled sleep, and she continually awoke shivering. Though I had not walked much to-day, I was dreadfully tired, and I felt that I ought to have medical advice myself, as soon as possible. My head was whirling, and all sorts of thoughts raged within it. I felt a presentiment that this child would prove a heritage of trouble to me ; but I was still more anxious about Natasha, and her affairs ; in fact, looking back at this night of my life, I think I had never before had so terrible a load of trouble and anxiety on my mind as at this moment.

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## CHAPTER IX.

I AWGKE next morning quite ill—late, about ten o'clock. My head was aching and buzzing. I looked at Helen's

bed, and saw it was empty. At the same moment, I heard the sound of sweeping in the entrance hall, and on going to see what it was, I found the little woman holding a small brush in one hand, and raising her dress with the other, brushing the floor. The wood was neatly piled in a corner, the table cleared, the kettle polished; in a word, Helen had tidied the place up.

"Helen, little woman," I cried, "why do you sweep the floor? I don't want you to do it. You are ill; and I didn't bring you here to work for me."

"Who will sweep the floor, then, if I don't?" she said, straightening herself, and looking full at me. "Besides, I am not ill to-day."

"But I don't expect you to work for me. Do you think I shall reproach you, as Mrs. Bubnoff did, for living with me without paying for it? And where did you find that wretched brush? I had no brush," I added, in wonderment.

"It's my brush; I brought it here myself. I used to sweep my grandfather's floor with it; it has been hidden behind the stove ever since."

I came back into the room musing. I might be wrong, but it seemed clear to me that this child felt it irksome to live for nothing, and was determined to prove to me from the outset that she was earning her keep; if so, what a sensitive little character she must be, I thought.

A couple of minutes later she came in and sat down in her place on the sofa, looking at me with curiosity. Meanwhile I had boiled the water, made tea, and poured out a cup for her, which I gave to her with a piece of bread; she accepted it silently—no wonder! she had hardly eaten anything for days.

"Look how you've dirtied your pretty frock sweeping the floor!" I said showing her a large smudge on her skirt. She looked down, and then, to my extreme astonishment, she put down her cup, took hold of the muslin dress deliberately and with both hands, and in an instant tore the whole thing from top to bottom; having done this she looked up at me with flashing eyes, but saying nothing. Her face was white as a sheet.

"What on earth are you doing that for, Helen?" I asked. I began to think the child must be mad.

"It is *not* a pretty frock," she said, breathless with agitation. "Why did you say it was a pretty frock? I won't wear it, I won't!" she cried, jumping up, "I'll tear it up! I never asked

her to dress me smart ; she dressed me up against my will ! I've torn one dress up, and I'll tear this, too ! I will ! I will ! I will !" and in a moment she had seized the wretched frock and torn it almost to bits. When she had finished she was so weak and pale that she could hardly stand.

I gazed at this exhibition in silent wonder. She was staring at me, as though I were the object of her wrath, and with a sort of defiant expression in her eyes. However, I knew now how to treat her. I determined to go and buy her a new dress this very morning. This wild little nature must be managed solely by kindness ; she looked as though she had never come across good people in her short life. I knew that at the Tolkoochi Rhinok I could get a very neat frock for her, cheap.

The worst of it was, it so happened that at the moment I was nearly penniless. However, I had thought of a source whence I expected to be able to raise some money, so I took my hat and prepared to go. Little Helen watched me intently ; she seemed to be waiting for something.

"Are you going to lock me in again?" she asked, as I took the key, intending to lock the door after me as I had done the day before.

"Dear child," I said, coming up to her, "dont be angry ! I locked the door because somebody might come in. You are ill ; you might easily be frightened. Goodness knows who might come in ! Mrs. Bubnoff, for instance !"

I said this on purpose, by way of excuse ; but I really locked her up because I did not trust her, I was afraid that she might run away from me, so I thought it better to be cautious. Helen said nothing, and I locked her in as before.

I knew an editor, for whom I sometimes worked when particularly hard up for ready money ; he was a good paymaster, and he agreed to advance twenty-five roubles on account, an article to be delivered later on. I often did this sort of thing when I needed money. Having secured the needful, I went off towards the Tolkoochi ; there I sought out an old body who kept a general outfitting shop. I told her Helen's height, as near as I could, and she promptly brought out a pretty print dress, both cheap and neat. I got Helen a neckerchief, too ; and, when I was paying for the things, it struck me that she would also require either some little warm jacket or mantle as the weather was cold, and

she had literally nothing to wear. However, I put off this purchase to another day. Helen was such a funny, proud child, goodness knows how she would take my bringing her these things, though I had carefully picked out the cheapest and simplest clothes I could find. Nevertheless I bought her, besides the foregoing a couple of pairs of cotton stockings and one pair of woollen ones. I could give her these under the excuse that the room was a cold one, and that she was ill. She required linen, too; but all this I determined to put off until I should become more intimate with the child.

Then I bought Helen some old curtains to partition off her bed; I was sure that she would appreciate this, at all events.

It was one o'clock when I got home after all this shopping. My door opened so quietly that Helen did not hear me come in at first. I saw her standing at my table looking at my books and manuscripts; but, as soon as she observed me, she shut up the book with a bang—she had been reading it,—and walked away from the table. I looked at the book—it was my first novel, a small one-volume book, on the first page of which was my name, as author, as large as life.

“Someone came and knocked while you were away,” she said, “and asked why you had locked the door?”

“It may have been the doctor,” I replied. “Did you call out to him, Helen?”

“No.”

I said nothing, but took my parcel, untied it, and pulled out my purchases.

“Here, little woman,” I said, “look here! you can't go about in such rags as you have on now. I've just bought this for you; it's quite a common, everyday cheap thing, so you need not worry yourself about the cost of it. The whole dress only cost a rouble and twenty copecks.”

I put the frock down beside her. She blushed, and looked at me with big, wide-open eyes.

She was evidently greatly surprised, but at the same time I could see that she felt dreadfully ashamed for some reason or other. However, something softer and gentler lighted up her eyes now. Seeing that she did not wish to speak for the moment, I turned away to the table. My action had evidently struck her; but she restrained all show of feeling, and sat down with her eyes fixed on the ground.



My head ached worse and worse; the fresh air had not done me any good. Meanwhile, I must go to Natásha's, for my anxiety about her had by no means subsided since yesterday. On the contrary, it had increased. Suddenly, as I sat thinking, I heard Helen call me. I went up to her.

"When you go away, don't lock me up," she said, picking at the fringe of the sofa, with her head bent over it, as if that occupation were absorbing her whole attention. "I won't go away from here."

"Very well, Helen, I agree," I said; "but supposing somebody comes? Goodness knows who may come!"

"Leave the key here, and I'll lock the door inside; and then, if they knock I will call out, 'Not at home.'" She looked at me slyly, as though she would have added, "You see how easily *that* little matter can be arranged."

"Who washes your linen?" she asked, so suddenly and quickly that I had not time to reply to the preceding remark.

"There's a woman in the house who does it," I observed.

"I can wash," she said; "and where did you get that food from, yesterday?"

"From a restaurant."

"I can cook. I shall prepare your dinners."

"Nonsense, little woman," I said. "What can you know about cooking? You are joking."

Helen was silent. She didn't like my last remark, evidently. We sat quiet for ten minutes, at least.

"Soup!" she suddenly cried, without raising her head.

"What about soup?" I asked in surprise.

"I can make soup; I used to make it for mother when she was ill. I used to go to market, too."

"Oh, Helen, Helen," I said, coming up to her, and sitting down beside her on the sofa, "you see how proud you are. I am simply doing to you now just what my heart dictates. You are all alone, without relatives or friends, and you are poor and unhappy. I want to help you. You would help me just the same if I needed your help. But you *won't* look at it in this way; and you worry yourself if I give you the smallest thing by way of a present. You want to pay me for it at once, to work your title to it; just as though I were a Mrs. Bubnoff, and were reproaching you. If this is as I say, Helen, it is wrong and bad of you."

She did not answer. Her lips trembled. I think she wanted

to say something, but she grew obdurate again, and made no reply.

I rose to go and see Natásha. This time I gave Helen the key, with instructions to find out who it was, if anyone knocked. I felt sure that something unsatisfactory had happened at Natásha's, and determined to go there at once, but only to stay for a minute or two, for fear Natásha should mistake my motives, and consider me importunate.

So it turned out. She received me with a look in which welcome was not apparent. I thought I had better go away again, but I was so tired I had to sit down.

"I have only come in for a minute, Natásha," I said, "for your advice. What am I to do with my little guest?" And I told her all about Helen, up to my leaving the house.

Natásha listened silently.

"I don't know what to advise, Vánia," she said. "It's a strange little being, that's very clear. Probably she has been dreadfully ill-treated and frightened. Let her get quite well, and see then. You want to send her to my people?"

"She insists that she won't go anywhere. And then, goodness knows whether they will have her. Now, tell me, dear, how are you? You didn't appear to be very brilliant yesterday."

I said this rather timidly.

"Yes," she said, "my head ached; and so it does to-day," she added, in an abstracted manner. "Have you seen my people to-day?"

"No, I am to go there to-morrow. To-morrow is Saturday, Natásha."

"Well, what of that?"

"Why, the prince is coming in the evening."

"Well, I hadn't forgotten."

"No, no, of course not, I was just mentioning the fact, that's all."

She came and stood in front of me, and gazed into my eyes long and fixedly; her expression had a certain determination or obstinacy of purpose about it; she looked feverish and hot.

"Look here, Vánia," she said, "be a good, kind boy; let me alone now, I am not in the humour to talk to you."

I rose from my chair, and stared at her in indescribable astonishment.

"Natasha, dear girl, what *is* the matter with you?" I cried, aghast.

"Nothing, nothing," she said, "to-morrow you shall know all; but to-day I want to be quite alone. Go, Vania, go, at once, please; it pains me to look at you."

"At least tell me——"

"To-morrow, to-morrow, go away now, *quick!*"

I left the room. So astounded did I feel that I could not recall my senses. Mavra rushed out of the kitchen, and stopped me on the threshold.

"Well, was she angry this morning?" she asked. "I daren't go near her myself."

"Yes, she was angry; what is it all about?"

"Simply, that you-know-who hasn't shown his nose here for three days."

"How, three days?" I asked, incredulously. "Why, she told me herself yesterday that he had been here that morning, and that he was coming again in the evening."

"Evening, indeed! He wasn't here in the morning either. I tell you, this is the third day we haven't had a glimpse of him. You don't mean to say she really said he had been here yesterday?"

"Yes, she certainly said so."

"Well," said Mavra, reflectively, "then she must be very hard hit, if she won't acknowledge, even to *you*, that he has not been here. Oh, he's a beauty, he is!"

"But what on earth is the meaning of it?" I cried.

"I don't know," said Mavra, shrugging her shoulders. "All I can tell you is that she sent me for him twice yesterday, and twice stopped me on the road. To-day she won't even speak to me. Couldn't you manage to see him? I daren't leave her now."

I was beside myself, and rushed downstairs like a mad creature.

"Are you coming here in the evening?" Mavra shouted after me.

"I don't know, I'll see," I called back. I felt that it was quite possible I might be dead before then, I was so ill; something seemed to be stabbing me deep down to my very heart.

## CHAPTER X.

I WENT straight off to Aleósha's. He lived with his father in the Little Morskoy. The prince had a large lodging, although there was no one living with him excepting Aleósha. The latter had two fine large rooms to himself. I had been very seldom to see him, once only, I think, before this. He used to come to me much oftener, especially at first, when his connection with Natásha was a novelty.

He was not at home; but I went straight to his sitting-room and left a note for him.

"Aleósha," I wrote, "you seem to have gone out of your senses, since your father himself begged Natásha, last Tuesday evening, to do him the honour to be your wife; and seeing that you were delighted with his request, you must allow that your present line of conduct is, to say the least of it, strange. Do you know what you are doing by Natásha? At all events this note will remind you that your conduct towards your future wife is, to the highest degree, unworthy and negligent. I am perfectly well aware that I have no right to read you a sermon, but I don't care whether I have the right or not.

"P.S.—She knows nothing of this note, and it was not she who told me about you."

I closed the envelope and left it on his table. To my question, the servant informed me that Aleósha was scarcely ever at home, and that he would not now come in till late at night.

I reached home with difficulty, my head whirled and my legs felt weak and shaky. My door was open, and I found old Ikménief sitting and waiting for me. He was seated at the table, and silently, and with evident surprise, watched Helen, who in her turn as wonderingly gazed at him; but maintained an obstinate silence. "No wonder that he is looking surprised!" I thought.

"Well, Vánia, I have been waiting an hour for you," he said, "and I must say, I did not expect to find you living like

this," he added, surveying the room, his eyes full of amazement. On looking closer at him I saw that his old face was very pale and full of care and grief.

"Sit down, sit down," he continued, "I came here to see you in a hurry, on business; but what's the matter? You don't look yourself."

"I'm not very well, my head has ached since early this morning."

"Take care, my boy; you mustn't play tricks with yourself. Have you caught cold, or what?"

"Oh no, nothing but a nervous attack; it's all right, I'm subject to them. How are you yourself?"

"Oh, so-so, not very brilliant; but sit down, I have something to talk about."

I drew up a chair, and sat down beside him. The old man bent over towards me and whispered, without looking at Helen—

"Who is your little guest sitting there?"

"I'll tell you all about her afterwards, sir," I whispered. "She is a poor little orphan, grand-daughter of that old Smith I told you about, who died at the confectioner's."

"What, he had a grandchild, had he? Well, she is a queer little party. *How* she stares, *how* she stares at one. I tell you, if you hadn't come within the next five minutes I couldn't have stood it any longer. She hasn't said a word the whole time; she is not like an ordinary human being. I suppose she came to see her grandfather, not knowing he was dead?"

"Yes; she has been very unhappy; the old man spoke about her when he died."

"Well, well, you shall tell me all about it afterwards, perhaps I may find some way to help the poor little thing, if she is so unhappy as you say, and poor. But can't you ask her to go out for a little while now, Vánia? I must have a serious talk with you."

I told the old man that this could not be managed; but that we could talk before her perfectly freely, as she was still quite a child.

"Of course she's a child, but, you astonish me my dear boy; do you mean to say you have taken her in, here? Goodness gracious!" and he looked intently at the child once more.

Helen felt that we were talking about her, and sat silent and with her head bent down on her breast. She had found time

to put on her new dress, which fitted her capitally. Her hair was neatly brushed, and altogether, but for the *wild* expression about her eyes, she looked quite a lovely child.

"Now then," said the old man, at last, "clearly and concisely, this is the point,—" he paused; and I saw that though he seemed in a great hurry to get to business, and though he used the words "clearly and concisely," yet he could not find language to go on with. I wondered what I was to hear.

"Look here, Vânia," he began again, "I have come here with an important request; but first I must explain certain important circumstances." He coughed and looked at me, then blushed and got angry with himself for doing so, and at last decided to go on.

"No," he said, "I shall explain nothing at all; you understand well enough without that. In a word, I am going to call the prince out, and I want you to arrange the duel, and to be my second."

I fell back against the rail of the chair, and looked at him, beside myself with amazement.

"What are you staring at me like that for, Vânia? I am not mad!"

"But, good heavens!" I said, "what's your pretext—what's the object? And how can you possibly——"

"Pretext! object!" cried the old gentleman, "well that *is* good."

"Very well, very well," I said, "I know what you'll say. But what good can come of your fighting this man? I confess, I *cannot* see the use of it."

"I did not suppose you would see it, but listen. Our lawsuit is finished—that is, it is as good as finished; and I have lost. I have to pay up ten thousand roubles; they have condemned me to do it—my estate is held in security for the money. So this blackguard is sure of getting his award, and I, since he *is* sure of it, can now be considered an outsider. Aha! most noble prince, you have insulted me for two whole years, you have soiled my name and the honour of my family, and I had to bear it. I could not call you out all that time, because you would have said, 'Oh, you cunning old rogue, you want to kill me, so as to get off paying the money which you know well enough will be adjudged to me sooner or later. No, no; first let's see how the case goes, and then you can call me out.' Now, noble prince, the case is over and you are sure of your

money, so there need be no difficulty about the matter ; therefore, kindly step out here, to the lists. That's what the matter is ; there you are with my pretext and object ! Now then, do you still think I have not the right to avenge myself for all—for *all*, mind, for *all* ? ”

His eyes were flashing ; I gazed at him silently for a long time. I longed to get at his inmost thought.

“ Listen,” I said at last, determined to say the word without which we should never properly understand one another. “ Can you be quite open with me, or not ? ”

“ Yes, I can,” he said, firmly.

“ Tell me, candidly, then,” I said, “ is it simply the desire for *revenge* that prompts you to call him out, or is there something else ? ”

“ Vânia,” he said, “ you know well that there are certain subjects which I allow no one to name before me ; but I make an exception in this instance, because you have at once seen, with your clear perception, that we cannot discuss the matter without touching upon those subjects. Yes, there *is* something else. My real object is to save my poor daughter from ruin, and to prevent her from taking the fatal road which circumstances are pointing out to her at this moment.”

“ Yes, but how will your duel effect this object ? That is the question.”

“ By preventing what they are concocting. Look here, Vânia, don't suppose that I am the slave to any ridiculous feeling of tenderness. I don't make a practice of showing the recesses of my heart to anyone ; *you* don't know what is there either. My daughter has left me, left my house with her lover, and I have torn her memory from my heart, uprooted it once and for ever on that evening ; you remember it. If you happened to see me one day sobbing over her portrait, that is no proof that I am anxious to forgive her. I did not forgive her even at that very moment. I was lamenting my lost happiness, I was weeping over an empty image of past joy, not for *her* as she now is ! Very likely I often *do* weep, I am not ashamed of acknowledging it ; no more than I am ashamed of acknowledging that I used to love my child better than anything on earth. All this is apparently inconsistent with my present intention of calling the prince out. You might say, ‘ If this is so, if you are indifferent as to the fate of her whom you no longer consider your daughter, then why do you interfere

with what is being arranged for her?' I reply, firstly, because I don't want a base low man to be allowed to triumph; and secondly, because I feel the calls of common philanthropy. Though this woman is no longer my daughter, still she is a weak and defenceless and basely imposed upon creature, whom wicked men are deceiving more and more every day, in order to effect her utter ruin. I cannot interfere directly in the matter; but indirectly, by means of a duel I can and will. If I should be killed, or my blood be shed, I will not believe that she would step over the barrier of our lists, perhaps over my very body, and walk off to the altar with the son of my murderer, like the daughter of that king—you remember the story in that reading book you learned out of at our house, how the girl drove over her father's body in the chariot. Besides, if they accept my challenge and come out to fight, these fine prince fellows won't care particularly for the marriage themselves afterwards. In a word, I don't want this marriage, and I shall put forth all my power to prevent it. Do you understand me now?"

"No, not a bit. If you wish well to Natásha, how can you possibly desire to prevent her marriage, which alone can re-establish her good name? She *needs* a good name; there is long life before her, in which to feel the necessity of it."

"She ought to spit on the world's opinion; that's what her duty is. She ought to see that the greatest shame that can fall to her lot would be this marriage, this alliance with these blackguards, with this pitiable crew. Noble pride! that should be her answer to the world. Then, perhaps I might consent to give her my hand; and with her hand in mine I should like to see the man who would dare to insult my child."

This desperate idealism amazed me, but I guessed that the old gentleman was rather beside himself with passion.

"All this is too ideal," I replied, "and too violent. You expect her to possess a strength of mind which probably you did not endow her with at her birth. Do you suppose she consents to this marriage because she wants to be a princess? Why, the girl is in love; this is a matter of *passion*, of *fate*. Meanwhile, you expect her to despise the world's opinion, and yet you bow down before it yourself. You wish to turn the laugh against this prince, to make a fool of him; and, to attain this end, you sacrifice the happiness of your daughter. Is not this egotism?"



The old man sat gloomy and frowning, and for a long time did not answer a word.

"You are not just to me, Vânia," he said at last, and the tears lay shining upon his eyelashes. "I swear to you, Vânia, it is unjust, but we'll let that alone for the present. I can't turn my heart inside out to prove this to you," he continued, rising and taking his hat; "but I will say one thing; you spoke of my daughter's happiness—well, I categorically and absolutely declare that I don't believe in her happiness; not only that, but I am certain this marriage will never come off, even without my interference."

"Why so?" I cried, full of curiosity. "Perhaps you know something new about the matter?"

"No, nothing particular; but I don't believe that such a cursed old fox would ever really take the step. The whole thing is humbug, and I am sure of it; and, mark my words, the scheme will collapse. Secondly, supposing this marriage *were* to come off, that is, supposing the scoundrel really could gain something by its consummation (I don't understand how he possibly could gain by it under any circumstances, but unless he did gain he would certainly never permit it) and it did actually come off, then, ask your own heart, Vânia, would it be a happy marriage? Reproaches, humiliations, wretched boy-friends of the bridegroom's buzzing about her with their calf-love; all this would follow the union. He would begin to bully her after the first day; in proportion as her passion showed itself, so would his coldness increase, misery would ensue, and torment—perhaps ultimately *crime*. No no, Vânia, if you encourage this business, and help to bring it about, I warn you solemnly you will have to answer for it before God, and it will be too late. Good-bye, my boy."

I stopped him. "Look here, sir," I said, "let's decide so; we'll *wait*. Be assured that not our eyes alone are watching this affair. Who knows? Perhaps it will be decided for the best without any artificial interference on our part, and without the need of any duelling! Time will decide and develop better than we can. And meanwhile, allow me to add that your whole project is absolutely impracticable. You surely don't suppose for a moment that the prince would accept your challenge?"

"Of course he would. What are you thinking of? You forget yourself."

"I swear to you that he will get out of it; he will find some sufficient excuse. He will do it with perfect grace, and you will be made a fool of."

"Excuse me, wait a minute. Why not? Why will he not accept my challenge? No, Vánia, you are a poet; you don't understand these things. You are a simple poet. Why do you suppose he will not fight me? I am no worse than he is, mind, in point of family, and besides I am an old man and an injured father. You are one of our Russian authors, and therefore of honourable standing also, and you can quite well be my second, and—really I don't understand."

"Look here, he will bring forward such arguments that you will be the very first to allow that you cannot possibly meet."

"I'm; well, let it be as you wish. I will wait, a short time of course, and see what happens. Now, my dear boy, give me your word that you will not repeat this conversation either to *her* or to my wife."

"I promise."

"Another thing, Vánia, never *begin* this subject again with me."

"Very well, I won't."

"Lastly, another request. I know, my dear fellow, that it must be dreadfully dull at our house for you; but do come as often as you can. My poor old lady is very fond of you, and—well, she's dull when you don't come in, Vánia; do you understand?"

He pressed my hand hard, and I promised to obey his last request with all my heart.

"Now then, Vánia, how about money? Have you any?"

"Money!" I repeated with surprise.

"Yes." (The old man looked down and blushed.) "You see, I look at your room and at your circumstances, and it strikes me that you must have extra expenses, especially just now. So I thought; in fact, dear boy, here are a hundred and fifty roubles by way of beginning."

"A hundred and fifty roubles—and that by way of beginning; and you have just lost your lawsuit!"

"Vánia, you don't understand me. There may occur *extraordinary cases* where you will require ready-money. Sometimes ready money makes independence possible, independence of decision in certain crises and climaxes. Perhaps you may not want this money *now*; but the time may

come, and anyhow I will leave it with you. This is all I could get hold of. If you don't spend it, give it back. Now, good-bye. Good gracious, how pale you are! You look quite ill!"

I took the money. It was very clear for what purpose he left it with me.

"I can hardly stand up," I said in reply to his remark. "I am ill."

"Don't make light of this attack, Vánia, dear boy," he continued. "Don't go out to-day. I'll tell Anna Andréevna that you are ill. Wouldn't you like to see a doctor? I'll look you up to-morrow if I possibly can; you had better go to bed at once. Well, good-bye; good-bye, little girl. Here, Vánia, here's five roubles more for the child. Don't say I gave it, but just buy what she requires—shoes, linen; there are plenty of things she will want. Good-bye, my boy."

I saw him out of the gate, as I had to ask the dvornik to go and fetch something to eat; Helen had had no dinner as yet.

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## CHAPTER XI.

**B**UT I had hardly reached my room again when my head began to turn, and I fell full length in the middle of the floor. I can only remember Helen's cry; she threw up her hands and rushed to catch me. That was the last thing I could recollect. After that I remember being in bed. Helen told me how she and the dvornik (who came in just then with the dinner) had carried me to the bed. I awoke several times, and each time I saw the anxious, sympathetic little face of Helen bending over me. All this I recall now as a sort of dream, or as seen through a kind of mist, and the image of the dear little girl dances before me, vivid amid forgotten surroundings, like a vision or a picture. She brought me drink, settled my bed-clothes, or sat on the bedside frightened and sad, gently smoothing my hair with her little hand.

Once, I remember feeling a soft kiss on my face. Another time I awoke suddenly during the night, and saw by the

light of a candle, which was very nearly burnt out, that Helen had bent forward from her chair until her face was resting on my pillow, and there she lay fast asleep, with one hand under her cheek and her lips parted. I only finally awoke when morning came; the candle was quite burned out, and the rosy light of morn played on the wall. Helen was sitting on a chair at the table, and was fast asleep, with her tired head resting on her left hand; and I remember watching her childish face, with its sadly precious expression of suffering, and her strange beauty, which always suggested the presence of hidden malady, and her black long wavy hair falling about, and covering her pale cheeks, with the long eyelashes drooping over them; her other hand lay on my pillow, and I kissed it very, very gently; but the poor tired child did not awake, only a sort of half smile played for an instant about her pale lips.

I gazed and gazed at her, and so, gradually and quietly, fell into a most refreshing sleep, which lasted until nigh mid-day. When I awoke, I felt myself almost well, but a weakness and shakiness of all my members bore witness to the sickness which had held me captive the day before. I knew these attacks of old; I had often experienced them before. They generally came and went within the twenty-four hours, but during that period they always raged furiously.

It was nearly mid-day. The first thing I noticed was that the corner of the room was curtained off with the curtains which I had bought yesterday; Helen had chosen her place, and screened it off. The child was now seated before the stove making tea, and, observing that I was awake, she smiled gaily, and came up to me at once.

"My dear little girl," I said, "you have been looking after me all night; I didn't know you were so kind and good."

"How do you know I have been looking after you?" she asked. "Perhaps I have been asleep all night." She looked at me with a very sweet expression, but blushed at her own words.

"I woke up and saw you; you only fell asleep at daybreak."

"Will you have some tea now?" she asked abruptly, as though unwilling to continue the conversation.

"Yes, please," I said. "Did you have your dinner yesterday?" I went on.

"No; but I got some supper; the dvornik brought me some. But you mustn't talk, you must just lie quietly; you are not

quite well yet," she added, bringing me some tea, and sitting down at the bedside.

"Oh, I can't lie here long, Helen," I said. "I *must* go out."

"If you must, you must. Is it yesterday's visitor you want to see?"

"No; not that one."

"And a very good thing too; it was he who upset you last night. Are you going to his daughter?"

"What do you know about his daughter?"

"I heard all you said yesterday," she said, looking rather confused, and then frowning. "He is a bad old man," she added.

"What do you know about it?" I said. "On the contrary, he is a very good and kind old gentleman."

"No, no; he's wicked. I heard it all," she said warmly.

"*What* did you hear?"

"That he will not forgive his daughter."

"Yes; but he loves her all the same. She has not been good to him, and he is worried about her."

"That may be; but why doesn't he forgive her? It's too late now," she added; "if he *did* want to forgive her now, she wouldn't come to him."

"How! why so?"

"Because he is not worthy of her love," she answered excitedly. "She ought to let him alone now, and never go near him again; she should beg in the streets first, and let him see her begging, and see how he likes it."

Her eyes flashed and her cheeks burned. "This is not simply a spontaneous idea on her part," I thought to myself.

"Was it to his house you wanted to send me?" she went on after a pause.

"Yes, Helen."

"No, thank you; I'll go out as a servant first."

"How absurd you are, little woman," I said. "Why, whom could you go to as a servant?"

"To the first moujik I came across," she replied passionately.

"But moujiks don't want servants," I said, laughing.

"Well, to some gentleman, then."

"Do you think you could lead the life of a servant, with your character?"

"Of course I could, I should bear it. They would scold

me, and I should not say a word ; then they would beat me, and I should not say a word. Let them beat away as much as they pleased, I should never cry. They wouldn't like that."

"Helen, Helen," I said, "what an angry little woman you are ; and where did you get your pride from ? You must have seen a good deal of sorrow."

I got up and went to the large table, Helen remained sitting moodily on the sofa twisting the fringe, with her head bent down over it. She was silent. "Is she angry with me ?" I thought.

I took up the parcel of books of reference, which I had brought home yesterday for my article, and began to work.

"What are you writing ?" Helen asked, smiling timidly and coming up to the table softly.

"Oh, all sorts of things, Helen," I said ; "they pay me for doing it."

"What is it, a petition ?"

"Oh, no ; not that," and I endeavoured to explain that I wrote histories of various things and people, and made books which were called novels and romances. She listened with the greatest interest.

"And is it all true ?" she asked.

"Oh, no ; I invent the stories."

"Why don't you write the truth ?"

"Well, read this book here, and perhaps you'll understand all about it better. You can read, can't you ?"

"Yes."

"Well, peg away, then. This is my book. I wrote it."

"Did you ? I'll read it."

She evidently much wanted to say something to me, but hesitated, and was a good deal agitated ; there was something behind all her questions.

"Do they pay you well for this sort of work ?" she asked at last

"Oh, it depends. Sometimes more, and sometimes less. At times nothing, because my head won't invent. It's hard work, Helen."

"Then you are not rich."

"No ; certainly not rich."

"Then I shall work and help you." She glanced keenly at me, blushing, and then lowered her eyes, then suddenly rushed to me, and throwing both her arms round me, pressed her little

check close, *close* to my breast. I looked down at her in amazement.

"I love you; I am not proud," she said. "No, no; I am not like that. I love you; you are the only person who loves me—" but her tears choked her here. A minute more and her sobs were thronging from her breast, just as they had done the day before during her nervous attack. She fell on her knees and kissed my hands—my feet. "You love me," she repeated, "you love me; and you only, only you in all the world!"

She hugged my knees convulsively, with both her arms; all her concentrated emotion, kept within restraining bounds so long, had suddenly burst itself free in an irresistible stream. I understood the obstinacy and harshness of the child as I watched her, that little heart which invariably seemed to grow the more obstinate and the more harsh in proportion to the need it felt for overflowing in emotion such as this. Emotion so unconquerable and irresistible, that the whole being seemed to be merged in this yearning for love and gratitude, this craving for tears and caresses. She sobbed so dreadfully that she grew quite hysterical.

I had the greatest difficulty in loosening her hands from about my knees. At last I picked her up and carried her to the sofa. She went on sobbing for a long while, hiding her face in the pillow, as though ashamed to look at me; but she pressed my hand tight with her own little hand, and never let it go, squeezing it with her whole heart all the while. Little by little she calmed down, but still she did not lift her face; twice indeed her eyes did seek me out furtively for an instant, and each time I noticed a softness and tenderness in their expression which was quite new to them. At last she blushed and laughed.

"Are you better now, you dear little Helen?" I asked.

"No, no; not Helen," she whispered, still hiding her face.

"Not Helen, what then?" I said.

"Nelly."

"Very well, why not? Nelly's a very pretty name, Nelly be it."

"Mother used to call me that; no one else ever has, and I don't want them to—no one but mother and you. I want *you* to, please; and I shall always love you, always, always!"

"What an affectionate and proud little heart," I thought.

"How long I had to serve apprenticeship before you became

'Nelly' to me." However, I felt that this true little heart was gained over for ever, once and for all, now.

"Nelly, listen," I said, when she was quite collected once more. "You say no one ever loved you excepting your mother. Do you mean to say your old grandfather did not love you?"

"No; he didn't."

"Why, you cried about him, out on the staircase here; don't you remember?"

She thought for a minute. "No," she repeated, "he didn't love me; he was wicked." An expression of pain passed over her face as she spoke.

"But you could hardly expect much of him, Nelly, surely? He was so very old, he must have been half-witted or worse. He died just like a madman; I told you all about his death, didn't I?"

"Yes; but it was only during the last month of his life that he was like that. He would sit here, in this room, sometimes the whole day; and, if I didn't come, for two days and three days without bite or sup. He was much better before."

"Before what?"

"Before mother died."

"So *you* used to bring him food?"

"Yes, I brought him food sometimes."

"Where did you get it from, from Mrs. Bubnoff?"

"No, I never have taken *anything* from Mrs. Bubnoff's hands." She said this emphatically, though her voice trembled.

"Where did you get it from, then? You had no money, had you?"

Nelly sat silent, and grew very white; then she gazed at me with a long, long look. "I begged alms in the streets; and as soon as I had collected a few copecks, I went and got him some bread and a little snuff."

"Oh, Nelly, as if he really could allow you to do this."

"At first I used to go, and told him nothing about it; but when he found out that I begged, he used to pack me off himself to seek alms. I would go and stand begging on the bridge, and he would wait a little way off, and the instant he saw somebody give me money, he used to rush up and take it from me—just as though I wanted to hide it from him, and had not begged it on purpose for him!" While she uttered these last words, her mouth curved itself into a bitter, scornful



smile. "All this was when mother was dead ; he seemed to lose his wits then."

"Of course, he was much attached to your mother. How was it he did not live with you ?"

"Oh, no ; he didn't love mother. He was a wicked old man, and would not forgive her. Just like that bad old man of yesterday," she went on, almost in a whisper, and growing paler and paler.

I am not ashamed to own that I simply *trembled*. The plot of a whole novel was opening itself out before me.

This poor destitute woman, dying in a cellar, under the charitable care of a coffin-maker ; her little orphan daughter visiting her grandfather, who had cursed her mother ; the old half-witted man dying near the confectioner's shop, just after his dog's death.

"Azorka used to be mother's," Nelly said suddenly, smiling as though with some recollection. "Grandfather used to be very fond of mother, and when mother left him Azorka remained behind. That's why he loved Azorka so. He didn't forgive mother, and yet when Azorka died he went and died too." The smile died out of her eyes as she said the last few words.

"What was the old man formerly, Nelly ?" I asked, after a pause.

"He was rich once. I don't know *who* he was, but he was rich. He had some sort of a factory, so mother told me. At first, mother used to think me too young, and did not tell me all about herself ; she used to kiss me, and tell me I should hear it all in good time. She used to cry over me, and call me her poor little unfortunate darling ; she always called me that. Very often I used to hear her at night—she thought I was asleep, but I was only pretending—crying and sobbing, and kissing me, and saying 'poor little darling.'"

"What did your mother die of ?"

"Consumption. It's six weeks now."

"Can you remember the time when your grandfather was rich ?"

"Oh, no ; I wasn't even born. Mother left grandfather before I was born."

"Whom did she go away with ?"

"I don't know," said Nelly, softly and thoughtfully. "She went abroad, and I was born abroad."

"Where?"

"In Switzerland; but I have been in Italy and Paris too."

"But how do you know Russian so well, Nelly?"

"Mother taught me Russian, even when we were in Switzerland. She was Russian, because her mother was a Russian. Grandfather was an Englishman, but just like a Russian; and when we came here, a year and a half ago, I learned the language thoroughly. Mother was ill even then, and we got poorer and poorer. Mother used to cry and cry. At first she used to search and search for grandfather, and always said that she had not been good to him; and she cried and cried. Oh, how she cried! And when she found out that grandfather was so poor, she cried all the more. She wrote him a great many letters, but he never answered one."

"Why did your mother come back here? Solely to find her father?"

"I don't know, but it was so lonely living over there." Nelly's eyes sparkled. "We were alone there, mother and I; there was one kind friend we had—a good man like you, but he died, and soon after we came here."

"Was it with him that your mother left her father?"

"Oh no, not with him; mother left grandfather's house with another man, who deserted her."

"But who was it, Nelly?"

Nelly looked at me but did not answer, she evidently knew who the man was with whom her mother had eloped, and who was, no doubt, her father, but it was painful for her to name him, even to me.

I did not wish to bother her with questions. The child's nature was so strange, so nervous, and so irritable, though with floods of emotion always held back somewhere in reserve. All the while I knew her, and in spite of the love she bore me—so pure, so full, and bright a love it was, almost equal to the love which she had given to her dead mother, of whom she could never speak without pain; in spite of all this, she hardly ever broke through her reserve with me, and, excepting this day, she scarcely ever felt the need of talking about her dreadful experiences of the past; on the contrary, she generally behaved with the greatest possible reserve. But to-day, for hours at a time, and with continual interruptions of fits of anguish and sobbing, she went on and on with her story and told me all, in spite of the dreadful agitation which it

caused her. Never shall I forget the fearful story she had to tell!

It was the story of a poor forsaken woman, who had out-lived her happiness; ill, worried, and abandoned by everyone; rejected by the being in whom of all others she was entitled to trust—her father, who had been at some time or other injured by herself, and who, in his turn, had become maddened through his intolerable sufferings and humiliations. It was the story of a woman brought to despair, tramping with her little girl, whom she considered a child, through the cold and dirt of the St. Petersburg streets, begging; of a woman dying then and for months afterwards, by slow degrees in a damp cellar, and whose father refused to forgive her that past offence to the last minute of her life, but who at that last minute had thought better of it and had rushed to her cellar in order to extend the pardon which she so longed for, only to find a cold corpse instead of the daughter whom he loved better than all the world.

It was the story of mysterious, almost incomprehensible, relations of a half-witted old man with his little grandchild, who understood him and read him in some marvellous way, in spite of her childish years, and who understood a great deal more of the world in general than whole years of smooth, happy life could have revealed to her. One of those gloomy tales—those sad, obscure histories which are so often and so mysteriously enacted beneath the dark St. Petersburg skies, in the foul secret lanes and alleys of the huge city, in the midst of the giddy whirl of ever-boiling life, of black egoism, of conflicting interests, of vile corruption, of secret crime; in the midst, in a word, of all that goes to make up the hellishness of the most senseless, abnormal conditions of the life of a large town. But you shall hear all this history later on.

## PART III.

### CHAPTER I.

DUSK had long fallen, and the evening was well begun, before I awoke from the reverie into which this gloomy recital plunged me, and began to think of the present

“Nelly,” I said, “here you are quite ill and broken down, and I must go away and leave you, agitated as you are, and crying. Forgive me, dear, and know that there is another very dear and as yet unforgiven being, who is also unhappy and injured and abandoned, and that this poor creature is now waiting for me; and, do you know, child, your story has so touched me that if I don’t see her *at once* I scarcely know what I shall do with myself.”

I am not sure whether Nelly took in what I said. I was dreadfully agitated myself, partly from the effects of her tale and partly from my recent illness, but I rushed straight off to Natásha. It was late, nearly nine, when I reached her house. Before I arrived at the gate, I noticed an open carriage in the street, and it struck me that it was the prince’s trap. The entrance to Natásha’s lodging was from the yard. I had only just begun to mount the dirty narrow stone stairs leading up to her door, when I heard somebody labouring up in front of me, going very slowly and carefully, evidently unacquainted with the geography of the place. I thought it must be the prince, but soon changed my mind, for the higher the person got the louder he grumbled and growled, until, when I caught him up, he was swearing worse than any moujik.

What was my amazement to recognise the prince.

I thought he did not seem by any means pleased to run up against me in this sort of way. His first look was not one of recognition; when he did recognise me his face underwent

a very curious change. His first and natural expression was one of hatred and mischief, but it very quickly changed to one of the most winning and merry character, and he took both of my hands in his with, apparently, especial heartiness and delight.

"Ah, it's you," he said, "I was just going to fall on my knees, and pray for my life. Did you hear me swearing?" and he laughed in the frankest and most charming manner, but again his face changed; he looked serious, almost pained.

"To think that Aleósha," he said, wagging his head, "could go and put Natásha into such a lodging as this. It's precisely this sort of trifle that shows a man up. I *fear* for that boy. He is kind, he has a noble heart, but, here you are; he loves a girl to distraction, and yet he can allow her to live in a hole like this. I have even heard," he continued in a whisper, and groping about for the door bell, "that sometimes victuals have been scarce in the establishment. I simply *tremble* when I think of his future, and especially Anne's."

He did not notice that he had named Natásha wrong, in his irritation at his futile groping for the bell; there was no bell, after all; but, when I rattled the door handle, Mavra hastily opened to us.

In the kitchen, which was separated from the tiny "entrance hall," by a thin wooden partition, there appeared to be some cooking arrangements going on; everything seemed "got up" and smart, not in its everyday guise; we were evidently expected. There was a fire burning, and some new crockery on the table. Mavra hastened to help us off with our coats.

"Is Aleósha here?" I asked her.

"He has not been at all," she replied in a mysterious whisper.

We went into Natásha's room. There everything was as usual, and there seemed to have been no special preparations made; but then her rooms were always neat and charming, and there was no need to make any alteration.

Natásha received us at the door. I was struck with her face, it appeared so dreadfully thin, and ill and pale, though for one moment a blush did flit over her deathly pallid features. Her eyes looked feverish; she held out her hand silently but quickly to the prince; she was evidently rather bewildered, I did not even get a look from her, so I stood and waited silently.

"Well," said the prince, in a friendly and hearty tone, "here I am, you see. I only arrived an hour or two since. All the while I was away you were in my thoughts." He kissed her hand tenderly. "Oh, how I have thought, and thought about you; and I have the result of it all to tell you. Firstly, my young weathercock of a son, who, I see, is not here yet——"

"Excuse me, prince," said Natásha, suddenly, looking much confused, "I must say a word or two to Ivan Petrovitch. Vánia, come with me; just two words." She seized my wrist, and dragged me behind the screen into the darkest corner of the room. "Vánia," she whispered, "do you forgive me or not?"

"Natásha, what nonsense! What *are* you talking about?"

"No, no, Vánia; you've forgiven me too often and too much. There is a limit to everyone's forbearance. You will never cease *loving* me. I know that; but you may call me ungrateful. I *was* ungrateful, selfish, and horrid, both yesterday and the day before." She suddenly burst into tears and pressed her face to my shoulder.

"Oh, Natásha, please don't trouble your poor head about that," I hastened to reassure her. "I was ill yesterday; I am quite weak still; and I did not come before simply because I was physically unfit to move. *Please* don't think I was offended, or, anything. My dear old friend, as if I don't realise what you are going through just now."

"Thanks, then," she said, smiling through her tears, and squeezing my hand till it hurt me. "You've forgiven me as usual. We'll talk about the other things afterwards. I have much to say to you; but now we must go back to him."

"Yes, quick," I said, "we left him so suddenly."

"Come then," Natásha whispered, "and listen to what I shall have to say to him. I know *everything* now—guessed it all. *He* is to blame for everything. This evening much must be decided. Come, Vánia!"

I didn't understand her; but there was no time to ask questions. Natásha came out into the prince's presence with a radiant face. The prince was still standing, hat in hand. She gaily excused our conduct in leaving him, took his hat, placed a chair for him, and we all three settled ourselves round her table.

"I was beginning about that giddy boy of mine," said the prince; "I have only seen him for a minute, and then he

was just seating himself in a droschky to drive to the countess. And fancy, though he had not seen me for four days, he would not even get out and have a chat with me—in *such* a hurry he seemed to be. I'm afraid it's my fault, Natásha, that he is not here at this moment, and that I am before him; because, as I couldn't go to the countess's myself, I had to ask him to do a commission there for me; but he's certain to come in a minute."

"He promised you, doubtless, that he would come to-day?" asked Natásha, with extreme simplicity in her face as she looked at the prince.

"Good heavens! of course he is coming!" cried the prince, staring at her in astonishment. "What a thing to say! "Oh!" he continued, "I understand; you are angry with him for coming later than we did. It *does* seem bad form; but don't be vexed with him, for, as I tell you, it is my fault. Aleósha is a frivolous, giddy youth, I don't deny it; but there are special circumstances which make it most desirable that he should not cut the countess and certain other society houses just now; on the contrary, he must be particularly polite and call very often. Therefore, since I dare swear he hasn't left your side all the while I have been away, and has forgotten all about the rest of the world, please don't be angry if I carry him off now and again for an hour or two on society business, I'll engage that he has not been near the countess's since that evening. I wish I had asked him just now, when I saw him."

I looked at Natásha; she was listening to the prince with a faint, half-amused smile on her face. But the man spoke so naturally, so unaffectedly and simply that it seemed absolutely impossible to doubt his sincerity.

"And you really are not aware that he has not been near me all these days?" She said this as though it were the most ordinary observation.

"*What!* not been near you all these days? Excuse me," said the prince, apparently in a state of boundless amazement, "what *do* you mean?"

"You were here on Tuesday evening; next morning he came in, for half an hour and since that moment I have not set eyes on him."

"Oh! but it's *impossible*." The prince became more and more amazed. "Why, I thought he had not left you for a moment. pardon me, but this is more than surprising—it is incredible."

"Yet it's quite true, and I am so sorry; I waited for you in hopes that you might be able to tell me where he is."

"Good heavens! why, he'll be here directly; but this communication of yours has *so amazed* me, that I really—I expected *anything* of him but this; anything—anything."

"How surprised you are; and do you know, I not only thought that you would not be surprised, but I actually believed that you knew how it would be all along."

"*Knew* it! I? Natásha Nicolaevna, I give you my word that I have only seen him for a minute to-day, and that I asked him no questions at all, and I must say, I think it strange that you—well, you actually do not seem to believe me," he continued, looking keenly at both of us.

"Oh, heaven forbid!" Natásha exclaimed, smiling and looking straight into his eyes.

"Kindly explain then," said the prince, with apparent perplexity.

"Oh, there's nothing to explain, it's all quite simple. You know his flighty, forgetful nature? Well, as soon as he had liberty given him he went off, and something or somebody has attracted him."

"Oh, no! oh, no! that sort of thing cannot possibly have happened. There's more behind, and the instant he comes I will make him confess it all. But what surprises me is that you seem to blame *me* for something or other, when I was not even here. However, Natásha, I can see very plainly that you are angry with him. Naturally enough, you have a right to be so, and of course, I am catching it because I came first; isn't it so?" he said, turning to me with an irritating smile.

Natásha flushed up.

"I admit, Natásha Ivanovna," he continued with dignity, "that I am to blame inasmuch that I left town the day after our introduction; had I stayed here you would have known me better and would not have had the opportunity, which I observe you have taken, of altering the opinion you had formed of me on that occasion. Your character, I have remarked, is a little inclined to *suspicion*. Circumstances have led you to think ill of me; but, if I had been at hand to look after him, Aleósha should not have behaved like this; you shall hear, when he comes, how I intend to pitch into the young rascal for it."

"That is, you will begin to make *me a drag* upon him. It is impossible that a man of your penetration could seriously



suppose that such a proceeding would be of service to my cause."

"Dear me. You hint that my *object* is to make him feel that you are a drag upon him. Thank you, Natásha Nicolaevna, you are not exactly kind to me to day."

"No, I do my best to avoid *hinting*, whomsoever I may be talking with," Natásha replied; "on the contrary, I try to make my meaning as clear as possible, as I dare say you will remark this very day. I do not wish to offend; I have no reason to wish it, if only because I know very well that nothing I said would or could offend you. I am quite sure of this, because I understand our mutual relations thoroughly. Why, you cannot look seriously upon these relations. Now can you? However, if I really have said anything to offend you, I am, of course, ready to apologise, in deference to the laws of—hospitality." In spite of the light, almost playful, tone in which Natásha uttered this sentence; in spite of the smile which played on her lips, I had never seen her in such a state of nervous irritability before. Now only did I realise for the first time the torture which her heart had undergone during the last two days. Her words, that she had guessed and knew all the truth of the matter, startled me; they referred directly to the prince. She had changed her opinion of him, and now looked upon him as an enemy; that was quite clear. She ascribed all her difficulties with Aleósha to his influence, and, perhaps, she had some grounds to base her opinion upon.

I was afraid of a sudden scene between them. Her irony was too open, she took no steps to conceal it. Her last words, that he could not look upon their relations seriously, and about apologising as his hostess, and her promise to let him see this evening that she could speak her mind plainly—all this was much too clear and unmistakeable for the prince to misunderstand. I noticed that his expression changed, but he had full mastery over himself. He instantly put on the appearance of not having observed the meaning of her words, and answered them playfully.

"Oh, heaven forbid!" he said, laughing. "Don't apologise, I beg. I never wish ladies to apologise; that's a rule with me. I told you something of my character the last time I was here, and so you will pardon my saying, especially as it is the case with *all* women. You will agree with me, I'm sure," he added to me, with a charming smile, "that it is a trait in the character

of every woman to be far more ready to admit her guilt as to anything, and to gloss it over with a thousand caresses, sometime after the offence, than to admit it at once, even if taken red-handed, and to beg forgiveness! Therefore, if we pre- suppose that I have been offended by you, I make a point of saying nothing about it at present, because I know that it will pay me better to wait a little, when you will be ready to admit your fault, and to atone for it before me with a thousand caresses. And you are so good, and sweet, and fresh, and delightful, that I foresee your moment of repentance will be most charming. Now then, instead of apologies and forgivenesses, cannot I prove to you somehow, *to-day*, that I am far more sincere and candid in my behaviour towards you than you will give me credit for?"

Natasha blushed. It struck me, too, that the prince's tone was a little *too* playful. His jesting verged on the immodest.

"You wish to prove to me that your conduct towards me is sincere and candid?" she asked, with a keen look at the prince.

"Yes."

"Then fulfil my request."

"My word upon it, even before I hear it."

"Very well, then; do not worry Aleósha about *me* either to-day or to-morrow, by word or hint. Do not utter a word of reproach respecting his having forgotten me. Say nothing about it. I wish to meet him as though there were no bone to pick between us. I wish him to notice nothing in me that savours of complaint. I must have this so. Will you give me your word?"

"With the greatest pleasure; and permit me to add, that rarely have I met anyone with so intelligent and clear an insight into such things as yourself. But here comes Aleósha himself, I think."

And, sure enough, there was a sound in the entry. Natasha flushed up, and seemed to prepare herself for something. The prince sat still, with a serious air, as though awaiting events; but he watched Natasha intently. Then the door opened, and in rushed Aleósha.

## CHAPTER II

HE *rushed* into the room, looking radiant and happy. Evidently he had spent four very jolly days. He wore the look of having something to tell us.

"Well," he cried to the company in general; "here I am, you see; and I ought to have been here first of all! But you shall know all directly, directly. Just now, father, I hadn't time to say two words to you, and yet I have heaps of things to tell you. I am absolutely *changed* during the last four days. I'll tell you all about that, too. The chief thing is, first of all—Here *she* is, the darling! Natásha again, my beauty, my angel! How are you, my Natásha?" he cried, sitting down by her, and kissing her hands enthusiastically.

"I've been so grieved about you these days, my beauty; but what's to be done? I couldn't come; I couldn't manage it anyhow. You seem to have grown thinner, my darling, and you look so pale. What is it?" He covered her hand with kisses ecstatically, and gazed tenderly at her with his fine eyes, as though he could never look enough.

I glanced at Natásha, and saw at once that our thoughts were the same. He was perfectly innocent. A ruby glow overspread her pale cheeks, as though all the blood in her heart had suddenly collected there; her eyes sparkled and flashed, and she looked at the prince proudly.

"But where—have you been—so many days?" she asked, in a subdued and rather broken voice. She was breathing heavily and irregularly. My God, how she loved that boy!

"Yes, that's just it; I seem to be to blame. *Scem!* of course I *am* to blame, and I came here because I *knew* I was to blame. Kátia told me yesterday and to-day, too, that no woman would forgive such neglect. She knows all about our Tuesday's conversation and arrangement; I told her next day. I argued the matter with her, and said Natásha was the girl's name, and that in all the world there was only one other equal to her, and that was Kátia. Of course, I got the

best of the argument. As though, angel-like, you would not forgive me! 'If he has not turned up, something prevented him;' that's what I knew my Natásha would be thinking about it, not that I had ceased to love her; absurd idea! My whole heart bled for you; but I am to blame, of course. When you know all, you will be the first to justify me. I will tell you the whole story at once; I want to unburden myself before you all; I came on purpose. To-day I had half a minute of spare time, and wanted to come straight here, just to kiss you and away again, when I was prevented. Kátia sent to say that she must see me on important business. That was before you saw me on the droshky, father. I was going to her again then, in response to a second note. We have notes flying backwards and forwards ail day just now. Vánia, I only saw your note last night. All you said was perfectly right and just. I admit it; but what was to be done? Physical impossibility! so I thought: 'Well, well, to-morrow evening I will justify myself before them all.' I couldn't have kept away this evening, Natásha."

"What note are you referring to?" Natásha asked.

"Oh, he came to see me, and didn't find me at home; so he left me a note, pitching into me like anything for not coming to see you; and he was quite right. That was last night."

"But if you had plenty of time to be at Kátia's from morn till night——" the prince began.

"Oh, I know, I know what you are going to say," Aleósha cut in. "You are going to say, 'If you could go to Katia's, you should have been able to come here far more.' I quite agree. Indeed, I admit that for a million reasons I should have come here *first*. But there are thousands of unexpected events in life, which alter our little arrangements, and some such events have occurred to me during these days. Why, I tell you, I am totally changed in these four days. So you may imagine that I have had matters of some importance to deal with."

"Oh, good heavens! do tell us what these matters were," cried Natásha, laughing feverishly. "For goodness' sake, don't wander so, Aleósha!"

He really was very funny. He was in a great hurry to get on with his story, and his words flew out of his mouth, tumbling over each other, and jostling one another in their

flight. He wanted to talk, and talk, and talk; and all the while he never let go of Natásha's hand, but kept raising it to his lips as he talked, as though he could not have his fill of kissing it.

"That's what it is," Aleósha went on. "What those matters were, ah! What people I've seen. What things I've done during these days. First of all there's Kátia! What *perfection* she is! Why, I didn't know her a *scrap* until now. Even on Tuesday, Natásha, you remember how enthusiastically I spoke of her then? Well, even then I hardly knew her at all. She has more or less been a closed book to me until just now; but now we know each other thoroughly. Oh, Natásha, if you could only hear how she talked about *you*, when I told her what happened here on Tuesday. By-the-bye, what a fool I was when I looked in here next morning. You received me with transport; you were full of our new and happy position towards one another; you wanted to talk it all over with me; you were serious, and yet playful with me, and I behaved like some wooden dummy. Oh, fool! ass that I must have looked. I give you my word, Natásha, it was *pride* to think that I was going to be a *husband* so soon; and you were the first person before whom I had an opportunity of swaggering in my new character. How you must have laughed at me that morning, and how I deserved it."

The prince sat silent, and looked at Aleósha with a kind of solemnly ironical smile. He looked as though he were actually pleased that his son should show himself up in such a comically frivolous light. All the evening I carefully watched the prince, and became perfectly convinced that he didn't care a fig about his son, although he was usually credited with ultra-affectionate paternal feelings towards Aleósha.

"After being here, I went to Kátia's," Aleósha continued. "I have said already that only this morning we learned to know one another thoroughly, strangely enough. I hardly know how it came about. A few warm words, a few sensations, a few thoughts spoken out frankly, and we were close allies for ever. You must, you *must* know her, Natásha. *How* she spoke of you! *How* she preached to me about what a treasure you are to me, and all that. Little by little she told me all her ideas and views about life. She's such a serious and enthusiastic girl. She spoke about our duty, and the meaning of the saying that we ought all of us to work for the good of mankind. Well, as

we entirely agreed about everything in four or five hours, we finished by swearing eternal friendship, and by arranging that we will act together all our lives."

"How act together?" asked the prince with surprise.

"Oh, I'm so changed, father, that you won't, of course, understand me at all at first; but I anticipate everyone of your objections," said Aleósha solemnly. "You are all practical people in your set. You have your laws of experience, serious set laws, and you look askance at everything new, and fresh, and young. You laugh at it, and don't believe in it. But I am not the man you knew a few days since. I'm another man now, altogether. If I know for a fact that my creed is the right one, and follow it out to its logical conclusion, and do not err from the way of it, then I am an honest man. I am quite satisfied with myself. Say what you please, I am as strong in my new convictions as can be."

"Oho!" said the prince, highly amused. Natásha looked round uncomfortably. She didn't like Aleósha to get out of his depth in conversation, as he often did. She did not like his appearing foolish before anyone else, especially his father.

"Why, Aleósha," she said, "this is some philosophy you have got hold of. Some one must have been teaching you all this. Let's hear all about it."

"Yes, I'll tell you," he said. "You see, Kátia has two distant cousins, Levinka and Borinka, one a student, the other—well, just a young man. They are most uncommon fellows. They rarely go to the countess's, on principle, but they know Kátia well. When we began to talk about the aims of humanity she sent me off to see them, and I went and called at once. We got on capitally. There were men of twelve different callings there. Students, officers, artists, everything you like; there was an author too. They all knew you, Vánia, and expect great things from you in the future. I promised to introduce you. Well, they all received me as a brother. I told them I was going to be married soon, and they treated me like a married man. They meet very often; but always on Wednesdays at Levinka's and Borinka's. We talked about the present and the future, and science and art and literature. Delightful, it really was, I assure you. I had never seen anything of this sort before. Where have I been, I wonder? Where was I born? What ideas was I bred upon? Why, you,

Natasha, are the only one who has ever said a word about all these things to me. You really *must* make their acquaintance, Natasha. Katia knows them all. They speak of her almost with veneration. Katia has told Levinka and Borinka that, when she comes into her property, she is going to sacrifice a million roubles at *once* for the good of humanity.

"H'm! I suppose the managers of this million of money will be Borinka and Levinka?" asked the prince.

"Not at all! not at all! Aren't you ashamed, father, to say such a thing?" cried Aleksha warmly. "I despise your insinuation. We discussed the expenditure of this million roubles a good deal, and decided at last that it should be spent on the general enlightenment of mankind."

"Well," said the prince, with the same unpleasant jesting smile, "well, *I* certainly never did know Katia before. I expected a good deal of her, but not quite so much as *this*."

"How?" cried Aleksha. "What is there so strange about it? Because it's not in accordance with your own beaten routine! Because no one has sacrificed a million before! Is that it? What if she doesn't wish to live at other people's expense? For to live on these millions *would* be at other people's expense. I've only just learned this fact, but it *is* a fact. She wants to be a benefactor to her country, and to all men, and to pay her mite towards the general good. We have read about the mite in the Scriptures, and if the mite in this instance is millions, that has nothing to do with the principle. Why do you look like that at me, father? Just as if I were a fool or an idiot. What if I were a fool! Oh, Natasha, you should have heard Katia on that subject. 'Intellect is not the chief point,' she said, 'but that which directs it—nature, the heart, noble character, enlightenment.' But the chief exponent of this doctrine is Besmuigin a friend of Borinka's, and between ourselves, the head and genius of the society. Only yesterday, he said 'A fool, as soon as he admits himself to be a fool, is a fool no longer.' What truth, what genius, there is in that man."

"Distinctly a genius," observed the prince.

"You do nothing but chaff; but I've never heard this sort of thing from either yourself or any of your set; on the contrary, you hide it all, just as though you expected to be able to make all men of the same height, with their noses on one level. Ridiculous! Our aims are not half so impossible, and yet they

call us levellers. You should have heard how they talked last night, about——.”

“Oh, Aleósha, tell us your story, and don't go meandering on. You have told us nothing yet,” said Natásha. “What do you think and talk about?”

“Oh, all that concerns progress, and humanity, and love—these are the questions of the present day. We talk about reforms and love of mankind, and so on, and we have given each other our word to be perfectly frank with one another, and conceal nothing about ourselves. Only candour, only sincerity and open heartedness can attain our ends. Besmuigin is very particular on this point. I told Kátia about this, and she quite agrees with him. So we have all sworn, under his direction, to act uprightly all our lives, and not to mind what people say about us, not to be ashamed of our enthusiasm, but to go straight on. ‘If you want men to respect you, first of all respect yourself.’ Besmuigin said that, and Kátia entirely confirmed his views. We have all undertaken to study these new principles separately and individually, and to talk about them among ourselves.”

“What nonsense all this is, Aleósha,” cried the prince, in some agitation; “and who is this Besmuigin? This matter must be looked into.”

“What matter?” asked Aleósha. “Look here, father, why do you suppose I say all this before you? Because I hope and trust to draw you into our circle; I have promised them to bring you in. You laugh! oh, I knew you would laugh; but listen! you are good and noble-minded; you will understand. You have never known or seen these people. How can you judge of them without hearing them? You only go by what you know. No, no, you just come to us and hear us, and you will be ours. Above all I want to use all my power to save you from being ruined by yourself, and by your convictions and habits.”

The prince listened to this speech in silence but with extreme malignity of expression; there was mischief in his face. Natásha watched him with unconcealed repulsion. He saw it, but pretended not to observe it. However, when Aleósha had finished the prince burst out laughing. He even fell back in his chair, as though unable to control himself. And yet his laugh was absolutely artificial, it was quite clear that he was laughing solely for the purpose of putting his son to the greater confusion. Aleósha evidently disliked this; his



face grew very melancholy, but he waited patiently for his father's mirth to end.

"Father," he began, sorrowfully, "why do you laugh at me? I have been frank and open with you; if you think I have been talking nonsense, put me right; but don't laugh at me. Besides, what is there to laugh at? Is it because I have learned what is holy and noble? But supposing I am wrong, that all this is nonsense, mistaken, ill-advised, that I am a fool as you have often said—well, anyhow I have erred on the side of the good and noble. I have not forfeited my innate nobility; I am an enthusiast for grand ideals. Assume that these ideals are mistaken, still they rest on a grand and holy basis. I have told you already that neither you nor any of your set have ever said one word to me which could attract or lure me into your path. Reject them, and tell me something better than they can, and I will follow you and your ways; but don't laugh at me, because you mortify me very much."

Aleósha said all this very impressively and with real dignity. Natásha followed his words in evident accord with every one of them. The prince listened with surprise while his son spoke, and completely changed his tone when he replied.

"I did not," he said, "wish to offend you, dear boy; on the contrary, I am sorry for you. You are preparing to take a step in life for which you ought to throw off the giddy thoughts of boyhood, that's my view of the matter; I laughed involuntarily, and did not at all wish to offend you."

"Why did it seem to me that you wanted to make a fool of me?" said Aleósha bitterly. "Why has it long since struck me that you look at me not as a father upon his son, but like an enemy? Why does it seem to me that, if I were in your place, I should not deride my son as you have derided me? Now, listen, let us set this right *note*, once and for all, so that there may be no more mistakes about it afterwards; let us be candid and open. When I came on here it struck me at once that there had been some unpleasantness. I did not find you all in that state of mutual happiness in which I expected to see you. Is that so, or not? if so, then would it not be better for each to speak out at once? How much mischief may be averted by candour."

"Talk away, talk away," said the prince, "your proposal is most practicable, Aleósha. Perhaps we ought to have begun as you suggest." He glanced at Natásha.

"Do not be angry with my candour," replied Aleósha. "You

like candour yourself, and you have drawn it out of me. Listen! you agreed to our marriage; you persuaded yourself that Natásha could make me happy, you were most high-minded, and we all appreciated your noble conduct. Why is it then that you now find pleasure in laughing at me, and in hinting that I am a boy, and unfit to become a married man? and more—you seem to wish to humiliate and deride me in the eyes of Natásha. You are always glad when you can make me look a fool. Oh! I noticed that long ago, not only now! You seem to wish to prove to us that our marriage would be ridiculous, that we are not made for one another, just as though you did not yourself believe in that which you propose for us, and looked on the whole thing as a good joke; mind, I don't deduce this solely from what you say to-day. The other evening when I went home and saw you, you allowed me to hear some very strange and surprising expressions—*mortifying*, I might call them. And on Wednesday when you went away you let fall certain hints as to our present position, and spoke of her—not insultingly certainly, but still not quite as I should have liked to hear you speak of Natásha—so lightly, not lovingly, not quite respectfully; all this is difficult to explain, but the gist is clear enough; I dare say the heart can understand it. Tell me that I am wrong; put me right, satisfy me and her; for I see you have mortified her too; somehow, I guessed it the moment I came.”

Aleósha said all this with warmth and fervour, and Natásha listened with a kind of solemnity, much agitated, and with an expression of intense interest. Twice during his speech she said aloud to herself, “Yes, yes, quite true.”

The prince looked disturbed.

“My good boy,” he replied, “of course I can't remember every word I said to you, but it is very strange that you took this view of my meaning. I am ready to reassure you on any point that I can. That I laughed just now is natural enough. I tell you, I wanted to hide my bitterness by laughing. Whenever I think of you as a married man, I can't help feeling the absurdity and incongruity of it; forgive me, but it is very funny. You reproach me for laughing; and I say that it is your own fault. I am to blame too, perhaps, for not keeping an eye on you of late, and for only finding out this evening what sort of things you have been going in for. I must say I tremble *now*, when I think of your future and Natásha's. I was too hasty, I

see that you are not fitted for one another. Love passes, but unfittedness remains for ever. I don't speak about *your* fate ; but remember, if you are honest, that with your own fall you will involve Natásha's utter ruin.

"You have been talking for an hour," continued the prince, "about love of humanity, and noble convictions, and grand beings, whose acquaintance you have made, and so on ; but ask Ivan Petrovitch, here, what I said to him on the stairs, just now, when we were climbing up those loathsome steps and praying for our limbs and lives. Do you know what the thought was that came into my head involuntarily, when I reached the top ? I wondered how you, who profess to love Natásha so well, could allow her to live in a lodging like this. Did it never strike you that unless you have money, unless you are able to fulfil the duties of the position, you have no right to assume the state of a married man, or to undertake those duties and responsibilities ? Love alone is not enough ; love is proved by works, whereas you say, 'You may have to suffer with me, but you must live with me.' Why, it's an inhuman doctrine, most ignoble. To hold forth about universal love and general humanity and at the same time to sin against love without ever remarking it, is most incomprehensible. Don't interrupt me, Natásha Nicolaevna, let me finish ; it is very bitter to me and I must speak out.

"You say, Aleósha, that during these few days you have been attracted to the doctrines of the good and noble, and honourable and high, and reproach me that in my set you find nothing but dry veneration of the intellect ; but look here, to bind yourself to all that is noble and lovely, and then, after what happened here on Tuesday, to neglect the woman who ought to be dearer than all the world to you, for four whole days is—Well ! you admit that you argued with Kátia, and contended that Natásha, in her loftiness of mind, would forgive you ; but what right have you to count on her forgiveness in such a case, and even to offer to lay a wager upon it ? You surely do not mean to say that you never once thought of all the bitter reflections, suspicions, and heart-burnings, that you allotted Natásha for her portion all that while ? Surely, because you were there attracted by certain new ideas, you had no right to neglect your very first duties here ? Forgive me, Natásha, for breaking my word ; but present circumstances over-ride my promise ; you

will understand that yourself. You are not, perhaps, aware, Aleósha, that I found Natásha in the midst of sufferings which had made these last few days a hell for her, these days which should have been some of the happiest in her life. You show me your acts on one side, and to counter-balance them you give us words, words, and words for the other. Am I right, or am I not? And you can calmly blame *me*, when you are wrong yourself from every point of view."

The prince finished. He was impressed by his own eloquence, and could not conceal his triumph. When Aleósha heard of Natásha's sufferings he looked at her in a paroxysm of anguish, but Natásha had made up her mind to speak.

"It's all right, Aleósha," she said, "don't be unhappy about that; sit down and listen to what I am going to say to your father. There are others more guilty than you."

"Explain yourself, please, Natásha Nicolaevna," put in the prince. "I have listened to these hints for the last two hours, the position is growing strained; and I must say I did not expect such a reception as you have given me to-day."

"Very likely; because you thought you could so blind us with your words that we should lose sight of your real intentions. What am I to explain? You know and understand the whole matter as well as anybody. Aleósha is right. Your first and greatest wish is to separate us. You almost knew beforehand the details, perhaps, of what would happen here after Tuesday; you counted it all out on your fingers. I said before that you look on me, and on this marriage, which you yourself proposed, without real seriousness. You are playing with us, and have your own private ends. Your game is a good one. You play well. Aleósha was right when he said that you look on all this as a good joke. You ought to be delighted, and not reproach Aleósha; because, without knowing it, he has carried out everything you intended him to do, perhaps even more fully than you hoped."

I was stupefied with amazement. I had not expected such a catastrophe this evening; and the too cutting candour of Natásha, and the unconcealed suspicion of her tone in addressing the prince, amazed me to the very limits of wonder. She *must* know something, I thought. Very likely she was waiting impatiently for the prince, simply for the sake of throwing all this in his teeth. The prince had paled a little at Natásha's sally, and Aleósha's face bore evidence to his anxiety.

"Just think, reflect what you have accused me of," cried the prince. "Just think over it a little. I cannot understand what you are driving at."

"Oh! indeed. Then you don't *wish* to understand," said Natásha. "Why, even Aleósha there detected your intentions just as I did, though I had not even seen him or spoken to him about the matter. He, too, thought that you were playing an undignified, insulting game with us, though he loves you and reveres and believes in you like a divinity. You did not think it necessary to be any more careful with him—more cunning. You counted on his guessing nothing. But Aleósha has a sensitive, tender heart, and your words—your *tone* as he calls it, remained impressed upon that heart."

"I don't understand a word; not a word," repeated the prince, turning to me with an expression of amazement, as though calling me to witness. He was quite wound up and heated by this time. "You are suspicious, and you are agitated," he continued to her. "To put it simply, you are jealous of Kátia, and therefore you are ready to find fault with all the world, and me in particular; and—allow me to finish—one sees a strange revelation of your character. I am not accustomed to this kind of scene, and I should not stay here a single minute more did not my son's interests—I am waiting for you to be good enough to explain."

"Oh, then you are determined to be obstinate and to refuse to understand in a couple of words, though you see through and through the whole matter in reality? You insist upon my telling you everything out and out in plain language?"

"That's all I am waiting for."

"Very well, then," cried Natásha, her eyes flashing with anger, "very well, listen; I'll tell you all."

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### CHAPTER III.

SHE stood up, and began to speak standing; not even observing the fact in the extremity of her agitation. The prince listened awhile, and then stood up also. The scene became impressively solemn.

"Recall your own sally of Tuesday to mind," Natásha began. "You said, 'I must have money and weight in the world.' Do you remember?"

"Yes."

"Very well, then, in order to obtain this money and all these advantages, which were slipping out of your hands, you came here last Tuesday, and invented our engagement, calculating that this farce would assist you to obtain hold once more of what was slipping away from you."

"Natásha," I cried, "think what you are saying."

"Farce!" repeated the prince in a tone of deeply-injured dignity. Aleósha sat silent, half dead with sorrow, and hardly took in a word.

"Yes, yes; don't interrupt me. I have promised to tell you all," continued poor excited Natásha. "You remember quite well Aleósha would not obey you. You had worked for half a year to separate him from me; he would not give in to you. Suddenly a moment came when you could wait no longer. If you let go of him, his bride and her money (chiefly her money, of course), three million roubles—all would slip through your fingers. Only one thing remained; Aleósha must fall in love with the girl whom you had fixed upon for his wife. You pondered; if he fell in love with her, then, perhaps, he would throw me over."

"Natásha, Natásha!" Aleósha called out in despair, "what *are* you saying, darling?"

"You tried to compass it," Natásha continued, making no pause at Aleósha's cry; "but the same old story again; all might go well, but *I* was in the way. Only one thing gave you hope; you, as an experienced and cunning man, had doubtless remarked that Aleósha occasionally became rather bored with his old love. You could not avoid observing that he had begun to neglect me a little at times, and sometimes was four or five days without coming near me. 'Perhaps he will get tired of her and throw her up altogether,' you thought; but Aleósha's decided action of Tuesday struck you forcibly. What must you do next? you thought."

"Excuse me," the prince struck in; "on the contrary——"

"I say," insisted Natásha, "that that evening you said to yourself, 'What shall I do next?' and you decided to allow him to marry me; that is not *actually*, but in words—to pacify him! We can put off the wedding, you thought, as long as we like;

and, meanwhile, a new love was being born and developing in his heart. You had observed that; and on the foundation of this new love your whole structure depended!"

"Novels, novels!" the prince said, as though speaking to himself. "Solitude. suspicious nature, and too many novels!"

"Yes; you built everything on the basis of this new love," Natásha continued, taking not the slightest notice of the prince's remark—she was at fever heat now, "and what splendid chances of growth this new love had. Why, it began even before he had realised the girl's perfection! At that very moment when Aleósha unbosomed himself to this girl, and told her that he could never love her, because duty and another attachment prevented him, she suddenly displayed before him so much nobility of character, and generosity to him and her rival, such wealth of forgiveness, that he—although he did not believe much in her beauty, and till that moment had not even thought of her as beautiful—came straight off to me and talked of nothing but her and of how she had impressed him. And the next day, too, he must needs go and see this ideal, beautiful being, if only out of gratitude. And why not go and see her? The old love was suffering no longer, her fate was decided, he could have her for ever, and this other girl was only to be seen for a minute or so, now! What a wretched creature Natásha would be were she to grudge him that one little minute! And then, Natásha, this same Natásha, finds that not only that minute, but a day, another, a third are taken from her and given to the new love! And meanwhile, the other displays herself to him in the most attractive guise; she appears as the pink of generosity, of enthusiastic grace and goodness, and withal a simple naïve child, like himself, and therefore very good company for him.

"They swear eternal friendship, brotherly love and sisterly love, and wish to part no more all their lives. In some five or six hours' conversation his soul opens itself to the reception of new sensations, and his whole heart is given away! 'The time comes at last,' you think, 'he is comparing his old love with these new, fresh sensations'; *there* it's all old and commonplace, all seriousness and dullness, jealousy, and scolding and tears; and if they *do* give him a turn of playfulness, he is treated not as an equal but as a child."

Here tears choked the poor girl; but she fortified herself for another struggle, and continued:—

"Well, what next? Oh, *time!* Why, the marriage to Natásha is not coming off at once. Give him time and all will change. Then come your words, and hints, and eloquence—a little slander of this vexatious Natásha, a little showing of her up in an unbecoming light—and oh! I don't know how it's all exactly done, but the victory is yours. Aleósha; don't blame me, dear! don't say that I cannot understand, or do not value, your love! I know quite well that you *do* love me, and that at this very minute you do not understand my complaints. I know, too, that it is very, very wrong of me to speak out like this. But what am I to do when I understand and see all this as it goes on, and in spite of it love you, love you! My darling! more and more, I love you!"

She covered her face with her hands, and sunk down on the chair sobbing like a child. Aleósha rushed to her with a cry; he never could see her weep without crying himself.

Her sobs seemed to help the prince a good deal. All Natásha's cutting hints and accusations against himself, which he could not afford, for very respectability's sake, to pretend to laugh away—all this could now be attributed to a wild gush of senseless jealousy, to injured love, even to ill health. He might venture to display a little sympathy now.

"Calm yourself, calm yourself, Natásha Nicolaevna!" he said. "This is all ecstasy on your part—mere suspicion. You allowed yourself to be put out by the boy's foolish rigmorale; but consider, it is mere foolishness on his part. The chief fact to be remembered is what you reminded us of—the event of Tuesday, which surely ought to prove to you how boundless is the strength of his attachment to you; and yet you——"

"Oh! don't talk to me! don't worry me just now, at least!" Natásha burst in, crying bitterly the while. "My heart has told me the whole truth long ago. You can't suppose that I don't understand that his former love for me is gone! Here, in this room—left alone and forgotten, I thought it all out!—What else was there for me to do? I don't blame *you* Aleósha. Why do you try to deceive me? Do you suppose I have not tried my best to deceive *myself*? Oh, yes, indeed, and how often, how often! As if I have not hung upon every tone of his voice, and learned to read every line of his face, and his eyes! All is dead, dead and buried! Oh! *miserable* girl that I am!"

Aleósha knelt before her weeping.



"Yes, yes, blame me, it's all my fault!" he sobbed.

"No, no, I won't blame you, Aleósha! there are others in it—our enemies; they are to blame, not you."

"Oh, pardon me!" said the prince, with some impatience; "on what grounds do you accuse me of all these—well, crimes? You are simply indulging in guesswork, without a shadow of proof."

"Proof!" cried Nátasha, springing up from her chair. "You want *proofs*—artful, designing man! Why, you *could* not have been acting otherwise when you came here with your proposals. You were bound to pacify your son and temporise with him, so that he might the more freely and quietly give himself entirely into Kátia's hands; otherwise he would have continued to remember me, and would not have submitted to yourself—and you were tired of waiting! Well, is that true?"

"I admit," replied the prince, with a sarcastic smile, "that, if I had wished to deceive you, I should certainly have acted as you describe. You are very ingenious; but you should *prove* your allegations first, and *then* insult your friends!"

"Prove! And how about your conduct while you were endeavouring, openly, to separate us? The man who can teach his son to neglect and to play with his duties and responsibilities for the sake of worldly gain, or for money, is corrupting that son! What did you tell me just now about my staircase and this wretched lodging? Wasn't it *you* who cut off his allowance in order to *compel* us to separate—from bitter need and hunger! *You* are responsible for staircase and lodging, you double-faced man; and yet you can blame him! And whence came that unusual warmth on Tuesday evening, and those new and most unnatural convictions which you suddenly developed and displayed? Why did I suddenly become so necessary an acquisition? I have walked up and down this room for four days, and I thought it all out and weighed it, every word of yours and every expression of your face, and I am convinced that the whole thing was a game of play, a comedy—an insulting, base, undignified *pretence* and *sham* on your part! Oh, I know you well; I have known you a long time! Every time Aleósha came to see me from your house I guessed what you had been saying to him and instilling into his mind, from his face; I learnt all your influences in his expression! No, no, you can't deceive me! Very likely you may have other ideas in your head; quite possibly I

may not have touched the chief one, but it's all the same; you have tried to deceive me, that's the essential point, and that is what I was bound to tell you to your face!"

"Is that all? And these are all your proofs! But consider, you enthusiastic woman! in that sally of mine (as you have been pleased to call my speech of Tuesday) I bound myself too tightly—that would not be consistent with your ideas!"

"How did you bind yourself? How? What do *you* care about deceiving *me*? What does a girl's grievance matter to you—especially a poor wretched girl who has eloped, has been rejected by her father, is disgraced,—immoral! Is it worth while to stand on ceremony with such a person, if the amiable little deception is likely to turn out in the very least degree profitable?"

"Now think, Natásha Nicolaevna, what a position you are placing yourself in! You insist that I have insulted you, but I cannot understand how you can insist on being insulted in this way, how you can even *imagine* such an insult! Excuse me, but I cannot understand it. I have a right to reproach you for setting my son against me. If he has not assailed me on your behalf for what you said in your last speech, I feel sure that at heart he is against me for it."

"No, father, no!" cried Aleósha. "If I have not attacked you it is because I do not believe you capable of insulting Natásha so, and because I do not believe such an insult could be imagined."

"There! you hear," said the prince.

"Natásha, I am all to blame. Do not accuse him," said Aleósha again. "It is dreadful to hear you!"

"Listen, Vánia! he is against me already," cried Natásha to me.

"Enough," said the prince. "We must put an end to this. This wild flood of jealousy, boundless and senseless on your part, brings out your character in quite a new light to me. I am forewarned. We were hasty, distinctly too hasty! You do not even observe how you have insulted me—it is nothing to you. We were hasty—we were hasty! Of course, my word is sacred, but, I am a father, and I wish my son to be happy, and—"

"Ah! you are taking back your word," Natásha cried, beside herself. "And right glad you are of the chance. But allow me to tell you that two days ago I made up my mind to release Aleósha from his bond of my own free will, and now I confirm it before you all. I withdraw from the engagement."

"That means," remarked the prince, "that you wish to awaken in him once more all that disquietude which the sense of duty calls up in him—all the anguish of responsibility, to put it neatly—in order that by this means you may attach him to yourself as firmly as ever again. Why, this is consistent with your own theory: that's why I bring the argument forward! But enough of this; time will decide. I shall look out for a moment of less agitation to talk it all over with you fully. I trust that we do not now break off our relations finally. I hope you may learn to estimate me at a rather higher figure, yet. I wanted to tell you of a project of mine with regard to your parents which would have proved to you—but enough of this. Ivan Petrovitch," he continued, advancing to me, "now, more than ever, do I feel the desire to make your better acquaintance. I mean, above and beyond my former wish—you understand me? I hope to call upon you in a day or two, if I may be permitted."

I bowed. It appeared to me that, under the circumstances, I could not now avoid receiving him. He pressed my hand, bowed silently to Natásha, and left the room with the air of dignified, but injured innocence.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

FOR a few moments not one of us said a word. Natásha sat still, thoughtful and depressed. All her energy had suddenly faded away. She looked straight before her, but saw nothing, and she held Aleósha's hand in her own the while, unconscious and absent—he crying steadily, and occasionally glancing at Natásha's face with timid curiosity.

At last he began to soothe her in a nervous manner. He begged her not to be angry; he blamed himself. It was evident that he longed to justify his father, and that this was uppermost in his heart. He several times hinted at this subject, but never dared to broach it openly, being fearful of rousing Natásha's anger again. He swore to her that he loved her as much as ever, unchangeably and fondly, and excitedly justified his attachment to Kátia, repeating over and over again

that he loved Kátia, but only as a sister—as a dear kind sister,—that he could not break with her altogether, because it would be unkind and harsh; and he swore that if Natásha could only see Kátia they would be friends at once, that then everything would be cleared up, and misunderstandings no longer exist. He did not comprehend Natásha's fears in the least; indeed he had not thoroughly taken in what she had said to his father; all he knew was that they had quarrelled, and that fact lay like a stone on his heart.

“Do you blame me on your father's account?” Natásha asked him.

“How can I blame you,” he replied feelingly, “when I am the cause of the whole quarrel, and in fault myself all round. It was I made you angry, and in your anger you blamed my father, because you wished to excuse me. I am not worth it, Natásha! You had to find fault with somebody, so you made him the scapegoat. But he is really, *really* innocent. As if he would have come here for that!” he cried, greatly agitated; but seeing that Natásha looked reproachfully at him, he immediately became timid, and exclaimed, “Well, I won't say it, I won't say it! Forgive me! I am to blame for everything.”

“Yes, Aleósha,” Natásha began, with stirring emotion in her voice, “yes, he has come between us and annihilated all our peace, for life. You have always trusted me more than anyone in the world; but now he has instilled suspicion of me into your heart, and distrust; you *blame* me now—he has taken half your heart away from me. A black cat has run between us. He has drawn you to himself with his false arguments and affected simplicity,” Natásha continued, “and now he will continue to strengthen the barrier he has raised between us.”

“I swear to you that it is not so,” cried Aleósha, in great excitement; “he was beside himself when he said that he had been ‘hasty.’ You'll see to-morrow or next day that he will come to his senses and all will be right; but if it turns out that he really wishes to break off our engagement I solemnly swear to you that I won't listen to him. I shall find strength to resist him, I dare say; and do you know who will help us,” he suddenly cried, enthusiastically: “Kátia will, and then you'll see, you'll see, what a splendid creature she is! You shall see whether she really wishes to be our enemy and to separate us. Oh, Natásha, how unjust you were when you said

I was the sort of man who begins to fall away from his wife the day after the wedding. It *was* bitter to hear that. No; I am not that kind of man; and if I have been at Kátia's rather often——"

"Oh, Aleósha, go there as often as you like; it was not of that I spoke. You did not understand; amuse yourself with whomever you please, I cannot exact more from your heart than it can give."

Here Mavra came in, and remarked that the tea-urn had been ready for two hours, and that it was eleven o'clock. She spoke angrily, and it was evident that she was not pleased with her mistress for some reason or other. The fact of the matter was, she had been drawing the long-bow all over the house as to Natásha's marriage; and in the yard and in the shops in the street, and to the policemen at the corner, she had spread the news of how the prince, 'a general, and enormously rich,' had come to her mistress and begged her hand for his son; and now she had heard the conversation with the prince, and gathering that the whole thing was ruined and knocked on the head, jumped to the conclusion that Natásha was to blame for it all. "A nice state of things," she growled, "here have I been preparing this supper all day and all night, and running all the way to the Nefsky for wine, and now——" here her feelings were too much for her, and she left the room, banging the door behind her.

Natásha looked at me quaintly, and blushed. "You see, Vánia," she said, "I felt that this interview would end as it has, and yet I got this little supper ready; for I said to myself that perhaps, *perhaps* it might turn out differently; Aleósha would come and begin to make it up at once; and my suspicions about the prince would be dissipated; I should be reassured. And so I got the supper ready for all emergencies."

There was a capital supper brought in by Mavra by this time—fish, game, and a couple of bottles of good wine from Eliseyeffs. Poor Natásha! she blushed so as she spoke. Aleósha went into ecstasies.

"There you see, Natásha," he cried, "you did not believe in your suspicions yourself a couple of hours ago! No; this *must* be set right, I am the guilty party, and it is I that must put the thing straight again. Natásha, let me go off to my father's at once! I must see him, he is offended; I must go and make it up with him, and I'll tell him all—as from myself alone;

I won't compromise you in any way. I'll arrange everything. Don't be angry with me for wanting to leave you like this and to go to him; I am sorry for him. He will justify himself in your eyes, you'll see. To-morrow I will come early, and be with you all day—I shan't go near Kátia."

Natásha did not stop him, in fact she advised him to go. She was so afraid that Aleósha might insist on staying with her against his inclination. She merely begged him to say nothing to his father as from her, and did her best to smile gaily as she said good-night to him. He was just about to go, when he suddenly approached her, took both her hands and sat down beside her; he gazed at her with unspeakable tenderness.

"Natásha, my darling," he said, "don't be angry with me! we will never quarrel; and tell me that you will always trust me, as I do you! Now listen, my angel; once we had a quarrel—I forget what about, but it was my fault. We did not speak to one another; I did not want to ask pardon, and I was very miserable. I wandered about town with a heavy heart, all about the place, and then suddenly it came into my head, 'What if Natásha were to be ill and die.' When this idea struck me, I felt such a pang of sorrow—just as if I had really lost you for ever. My imagination grew more and more melancholy, and gradually I had the idea that I had been to see your grave, had fallen down upon it senseless with anguish. I fancied that I kissed your tombstone, called upon you to come out, if only for one minute, and prayed God to grant me a miracle and let you rise before me for just an instant; and then it seemed to me that I threw myself into your arms, and embraced you and kissed you; and I think I died of joy. And then I thought how that here I was praying for you to come out of your grave for just one minute, and yet we had had each other for months at a time, and had miserably neglected our opportunities of happiness, and had nagged at each other over and over again, and had refused to speak to one another for days and days. When I thought of this I could bear it no longer, and rushed away to you, got here, and found you waiting for me; and when we embraced each other, oh! I remember I pressed you to my breast so tight, just as though I were really losing you. Natásha, we will never quarrel again; I cannot bear it! And, oh Natásha, how *could* you think I could ever *leave* you!"

Natásha cried a good deal, and they embraced each other very tenderly, while Aleósha swore once again that he would never leave her. After which he drove off to his father's, perfectly confident that he would arrange the whole business satisfactorily.

"It's all over—it's all lost!" said Natásha suddenly, taking my hand. "He loves me and always will love me, but he loves Kátia too; and after a little while he will love Kátia better than me, and this viper of a prince is not likely to fall asleep, and then——"

"Natásha," I said, "I, myself, do not believe the prince is acting quite honestly, but still——"

"You don't believe all I told him, I saw that in your face; but wait a little and you'll see who was right! Why, I only spoke to him in general terms. Heaven knows what his thoughts may be! He is a terrible man! I walked up and down here for four days, and I thought it all out thoroughly. He felt that he *must* release Aleósha from the embarrassing weight of my love. He invented this fiction of our engagement, so as to make his influence upon both of us felt, and so as to bewitch Aleósha with his assumption of simplicity and high-mindedness. This is true, Vánia, it is really; Aleósha is just the man to be taken in like this! He would be easy about me; he would say to himself, 'Oh! she's as good as my wife, now I have got her safe forever—*she's* all right,' and he would unconsciously give more serious attention to Kátia. The prince has evidently studied this Kátia, and has found out that she is likely to attract Aleósha in the end more strongly than myself. Oh Vánia, my hope is all in you now! He wants to get 'in' with you for some reason or other; don't deny him this wish, and do try, above all, dear, to get to know the countess. Make Kátia's acquaintance, observe her well, and report to me what she is like. I want you to keep an eye on them; no one understands me like yourself, and you know what I want you to do. Find out how far their 'friendship' has gone, and what they talk about, those two, together; above all, study Kátia—Kátia! Show me your friendship, my dear, good old Vánia, this one time more; you are my only hope now—my only hope!"

When I reached home it was nearly one o'clock at night. Nelly opened the door for me with a sleepy face. She smiled and looked brightly at me. Poor little mite! she was dread-

fully ashamed of having been asleep; she wanted to wait up for me.

She told me that somebody had been to ask for me, had sat awhile with her, and had left a note on the table—the note was from Maslobóeff; he invited me to come to him to-morrow at one o'clock. I wanted to ask Nelly about Maslobóeff, but she looked so tired that I put it off, and insisted on her going to bed at once. She had kept awake, she said, until half an hour before I came.

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## CHAPTER V.

NEXT morning Nelly told me strange things about Maslobóeff's visit. To begin with, it was strange enough that he had been at all yesterday, for he must have known that I should not be at home; I had told him so myself, and he remembered it well, I was sure of that. Nelly said, that at first she had not wished to open the door; but he had begged her to do so through the panels, assuring her that if he were not allowed to leave a note for me now, something dreadful would happen to me next day.

As soon as she let him in, and he had written the note, he sat down next to her on the sofa. "I got up, and refused to speak to him," Nelly continued, "for I was afraid of him. He began to talk about Mrs. Bubnoff, how angry she was, but that she couldn't get at me now, and so on. Then he began praising you, and said that he had known you as a little boy. Then I began to talk to him. He pulled out some sweets, and offered them to me, but I would not have them. Then he began to assure me that he was very good and kind, and could sing and dance beautifully, and he commenced dancing about in the middle of the room; it was very funny. He said he would wait a bit longer, 'perhaps Vania will come.' He begged me not to be afraid of him, and to sit down near him. I did so, but did not want to talk to him. Then he said he had known my mother and grandfather, and then I began talking about them with him. He stayed a long time."



"What did you talk about?" I asked.

"Oh, mother, and Mrs. Bubnoff, and grandfather. He stayed about two hours."

Nelly evidently did not want to let out much about their conversation, so I did not press her, hoping to find out from Maslobóeff. It seemed clear that Maslobóeff had come on purpose to find her alone. "What was the meaning of it?" I wondered.

She showed me three bonbons—nasty looking things, laughing the while.

"Why don't you eat them?" I asked.

"I didn't want them. I didn't take them; he left them on the sofa."

I had a good deal to do to-day, so I began to take leave of Nelly. "Shall you be dull alone?" I asked her.

"Dull and not dull," she said; "dull because you are away so long," and she looked at me with eyes that were brimful of love. All this morning she had looked at me with this affectionate, tender expression; and she was so gay, and so gentle and caressing; but I could not help thinking that there was some reserve, almost timidity in her manner, as though she were afraid of offending me about something or other, or of losing her hold on my affection.

"And why *not* dull?" I asked. "You said both 'dull and not dull' just now." I could not help smiling at her with no better reason than simply this, that she was growing very dear and very precious to me.

"Oh, I know well enough why I am *not* dull sometimes," she said. We were standing at the door, Nelly before me with a hand on my arm, and the other playing with my sleeve.

"What!" I said, "is it a secret?"

"No; I—I've begun reading your book," she said softly, and, lifting her tender penetrating eyes to my face, she blushed scarlet all over.

"Oh!" I said. "Well, and how do you like it?" I was in the state of confusion natural to an author whose work is praised to his face. I would have given worlds to kiss Nelly at that moment, and couldn't. I *couldn't* kiss her just then, somehow.

Nelly was silent. "Why, *why* did he die?" she asked at length, with a look of most intense melancholy, glancing at me and quickly lowering her eyes again.

"Who?"

"Why, the young man—of consumption—in the book."

"He had to die, Nelly," I said. "There was nothing else to be done."

"He needn't a bit," she answered, almost in a whisper, but suddenly biting her lips, as though angry, and looking more intently than ever at the floor. Another minute passed. "Well, and she—they, the girl and the old man," she whispered, playing more and more vigorously with the sleeve of my coat, "are they going to stay together, and not be poor?"

"No, Nelly; she is going a long way off. She marries a young fellow, and the old man remains alone," I said, sorry enough that I could not tell her something more soothing and satisfactory to her feelings.

"Oh, no! no!" she cried. "Why, why must it be so? I won't read it now," and she pushed my hand angrily away, walked to the table, and sat down with her face to the wall and her eyes on the ground. She was very red, and her breath came unevenly, as though under some terrible excitement.

"Oh, Nelly," I said, coming up to her chair. "Oh, Nelly, you are quite angry. Why, none of it's true. It's all an invention. What is there to be angry about, you funny child?"

"I am not angry," she said timidly, raising her bright, loving eyes to mine, and then, suddenly seizing my hand, she pressed her little face against my breast, and burst into tears. Instantly, almost, she laughed again, and cried once more, and laughed and cried together. I could not help being amused, but at the same time it was very sweet. She would not lift her head up for anything, and when I tried to raise her face from my shoulder, she pressed it harder and harder against me, and laughed louder and louder.

At last this highly emotional scene ended. We said good-bye, I was in a hurry. Nelly, all blushing, and still seemingly ashamed of herself, and with her two eyes shining and flashing like stars, ran out on the stairs after me, and entreated me to come home early. I said I would certainly come home to dinner, and as much earlier as I could.

I went over to the Ikméniefs' first. They were both ill; the old lady quite bad, while Ikménief was shut up in his study. He heard me come into the house, but I knew he would not turn up for a good quarter of an hour or more, as usual, so as to give me time to have a chat with his wife. I did not want to disturb the old lady's mind, and therefore I smoothed over

the narrative of yesterday's events at Natásha's, but I told the truth all the same. To my astonishment, she received the news of a probable rupture, not without emotion, certainly, but without much surprise.

"Yes, my boy," she said, "when you went away that day, I thought and thought and decided that it was too good to be true. We do not deserve so much happiness at God's hands. Besides; that man is such a scoundrel! What good can you expect of a creature like him? To take ten thousand roubles out of our pockets for nothing, and to *know* that it's for nothing, too! He is taking the last bit of bread out of our mouths. We must sell Ikméniefka! Natásha is quite right, and very clever not to trust such a man. And do you know what," she added lowering her voice—"my old man won't *listen* to the idea of the marriage. 'I won't have it,' he says, 'at any price.' At first I thought he would like it, but no! What would happen then, if it *were* to come off? He would curse the poor darling, I'm sure of it! Well, and what about Aleósha?"

And so on, question after question, and every answer I gave was unsatisfactory to her, as usual, and the cause of lamentation; in fact, I had noticed of late that the poor old lady was quite beside herself. Every item of news of any kind upset her. The trouble about Natásha had entirely paralysed her nerves and broken her down.

The old man came in in dressing-gown and slippers; he complained of fever, but all the while I was there he kept looking most tenderly at his old wife, fussed over her like a nurse with a child, gazed into her eyes continually, and even seemed to be timid in her presence. His expression was wonderfully gentle to-day; he was evidently frightened by her indisposition; he felt that if he lost her, too, then life would be bare indeed!

I sat for an hour with them; when I went out he came as far as the front door and spoke to me about Nelly. He had serious thoughts of taking her in, and adopting her as a daughter, and asked my advice how to reconcile his wife to the idea. He made all sorts of minute inquiries about Nelly; hadn't I found out anything new about her? and so on. I told him all there was to tell, and my tale made a great impression on him.

"We'll talk this over again," he said decidedly; "but I tell you what, I'll come over to your rooms as soon as I feel a little better, and we'll arrange the thing together."

I got to Maslobóeff's at twelve o'clock. To my amazement, the first face I saw on going in was the prince! He was putting on his coat in the entry, Maslobóeff was helping him hurriedly, and was handing him his cane. He had told me that he knew the prince, but still this sudden meeting surprised me greatly.

The prince seemed disturbed to see me.

"Hallo!" he said, "you here—well! this *is* a pleasant surprise!" His tone was a little *too* warm to be natural. "However, Maslobóeff just told me that he knew you; but I *am* glad, I *am* glad to see you! I particularly wanted to see you; in fact, I am coming to your rooms, if I may, as soon as possible. I have to make a petition—help me, will you; to clear up this strained position? You will understand, of course that I speak of yesterday's business—you are a great friend there; you know the ins and outs of this story; you have influence over them—so sorry I can't talk it all over with you to-day; but I have business—in a day or two I hope to be with you, perhaps sooner." He pressed my hand much too warmly, nodded to Maslobóeff, and went out.

"Now tell me, for goodness' sake!" I said, as I went in.

"I am not going to tell you *anything*!" replied Maslobóeff, taking his cap hastily and making for the front door. "I must be off, my boy; I have some most important business on hand!"

"Why, my dear fellow, you wrote me yourself asking me to come at twelve o'clock."

"What of that! I left you a note yesterday, and somebody sent *me* one *to-day*; my dear boy, such business, my head whirls! Forgive me Vania, old chap, but they are waiting for me; any satisfaction I can give you I shall be delighted! Here, hit me, do; punch my head for asking you to come and then going out, but do it quickly for goodness' sake; don't keep me, I *must* be off."

"Well, I won't hit you this time; if you have something to do, go and do it by all means, everybody has unforeseen affairs now and then—but——"

"No, no; none of your *buts*," he said, rushing to the door, and putting on his coat (I did the same); "look here! I have something most important to speak to you about, that's why I asked you now, so do, for goodness' sake come here at

seven punctually to-night. It's something that concerns your own interest! I shall be at home then."

"My dear fellow," I said, "I should be very glad; but I wanted to call somewhere else this evening."

"Go there now, and come to me in the evening; you've no idea what things I have to tell you."

"All right," I replied, "I'll do it. I declare you've quite roused my curiosity." Meanwhile we had got outside the house and were standing on the pavement in front.

"Well," he insisted, "you'll come then, for certain."

"I told you I would."

"No, no; that won't do. Give me your word of honour!"

"Very well, you funny old fellow!"

"Capital! Now, which way are you going?"

"To the right," I replied.

"Oh, well, I'm off to the left," he said. "Good-bye; don't forget seven o'clock."

I looked after him, and thought what a strange fellow he was.

I wanted to go to Natásha's in the evening, but, as I had now promised Maslobóeff, I determined to go to her at once. I felt sure that I should find Alcósha there, and so I did, and right glad he was to see me.

He was in a delightful humour, and very gentle to Natásha; as I say, he was overjoyed to see me. Natásha tried to be gay and jolly, too, but it evidently went against the grain. Her face looked pale and ill. She was very kind and caressing towards Alcósha.

Alcósha, though he talked a great deal, and did his best to make Natásha gay, and to force her lips to form themselves into a smile, was evidently anxious to avoid speaking of Kátia and his father, from which fact I concluded that his yesterday's attempt at peace-making had failed.

"Do you know what?" Natásha whispered to me, when Alcósha had gone out for a minute to speak to Mavra, "he is longing to get away and doesn't like to. I am afraid of telling him he had better be going, because then he is pretty sure to stay on purpose. What I am principally afraid of is, that he will stay on and get tired of me, and so, gradually, his love will cool down. What am I to do?"

"Good heavens!" I said, "what wild things you do imagine; and how suspicious you are, and how you watch and

spy each other. Why, simply tell him what you want to tell him outright, and the thing is done. This sort of forced position is just the kind of thing to bore him!"

"What shall I do?" she asked, frightened out of her wits at my suggestion.

"Wait a minute, I'll arrange it for you," I said, and went into the kitchen. I was going to make an excuse by asking Mavra to give my dirty boots a brush up.

"Be careful, Vânia," Natásha shouted after me.

The instant I appeared in the kitchen Aleósha rushed at me, just as though he had been waiting for me.

"Vânia, dear old boy, what *am* I to do? Advise me! I told Kátia yesterday that I would be with her to-day, just at this time. I can't break the appointment, you know. I love Natásha ever so much; I would go through fire and water for her, but one can't throw another girl over entirely—altogether."

"Well, what? go, of course," I said.

"But how about Natásha? It will hurt her feelings, Vânia; tell me how to manage it."

"Simply go at once," I said. "You know how she loves you; she'll think you are dull, and staying by her side against the grain. A strained position is always a mistake. But let's go in, and I'll help you."

"Dear old fellow, Vânia, you are always so good!" We went in. After a minute or so I said to him, "I saw your father this morning."

"Where?" he cried, startled.

"In the street, accidentally. He stopped me for a minute, and again begged to be allowed to come and see me. He asked about you, whether I knew where you were? He wanted to see you about something; he had something or other to say to you, I think."

"Oh! Aleósha, go at once and show yourself!" Natásha cried. She saw what I was driving at.

"Where shall I find him though? Is he at home?"

"No; as far as I remember he was just off to the countess's."

"Oh! but—how—what can I do?" said Aleósha, looking at Natásha with an expression of naive melancholy.

"What?" she said. "Why surely, Aleósha, you don't seriously wish to cut their acquaintance so as to soothe my feelings? What a childish thing that would be. Firstly, it is

impossible ; and secondly, it would be most ungrateful towards Kátia. You are friends ; you cannot break with her so roughly and suddenly. Finally, you simply offend me by supposing that I could be jealous of you. Go at once, I entreat you to ! Your father will be relieved too."

"Natásha, you angel, I am not worthy of your little finger." Aleósha spoke with enthusiasm and some remorse. "You are so good, and I—I—well, I'll just tell you. A moment ago I begged Vánia, in the kitchen there, to help me to get away, and this plan is simply his invention. But don't judge me, my angel Natásha. I am not entirely to blame, for I love you a thousand times better than anything in the world, and therefore I have got a new idea—to tell Kátia everything—about yesterday, and all. She will think of some plan to save us ; she is ours, you know, body and soul."

"All right, all right ; now go," said Natásha, smiling ; "and look here, dear boy, I am most anxious to make Kátia's acquaintance. How is it to be done?" Aleósha's enthusiasm and ecstasy knew no bounds. He instantly launched out into suggestions as to how the acquaintanceship could be brought about. According to him it was the simplest thing in the world. Kátia would arrange it herself. He developed his idea with warmth and excitement, and promised to bring back her answer this very day in a couple of hours, and to spend the whole evening afterwards with Natásha.

"Will you really come?" asked Natásha, as he went out.

"Surely you don't doubt it, Natásha? Good-bye, dearest and best ; good-bye. Good-bye, Vánia ; I always call you Vánia, because I love you so much. Good-bye. In a couple of hours, Natásha." He kissed her hands and went hurriedly out.

"There ! you see, Vánia, you see !" said Natásha, and burst into tears. Poor girl ; I sat with her two hours and managed to quiet her. Of course she was perfectly right, though, in all these apprehensions which assailed her, I was extremely anxious about her and her present position ; but what was to be done ?

Aleósha seemed so incomprehensible to me. He loved her as much as ever, perhaps more than ever, because remorse and gratitude added to the weight of his affection at present. But at the same time this new love was undoubtedly a power in his heart also. How would it all end? It was impossible to

foresee. I myself was most curious to see Kátia. I promised Natásha once more that I would make a point of knowing her.

Eventually Natásha became almost gay. Among other things I told her all about Nelly and Maslobóeff, and Mrs. Bubuof, of my meeting to-day with the prince at Maslobóeff's, and of my appointment with the latter at seven o'clock that evening. All this interested her exceedingly. I said very little about her parents, while, as for the visit of old Ikménief to me, I said nothing about it. The very suggestion of a duel between her father and the prince might alarm her dreadfully. She thought the relations between Maslobóeff and the prince, and the latter's extreme desire to know me better were very strange circumstances, although, of course, all might be explained by the present position of affairs.

Well, I went home at three o'clock; Nelly met me with her dear little bright face.

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## CHAPTER VI.

I REACHED Maslobóeff's at seven punctually. He received me with a shout, and with outstretched arms. It is needless to say that he was half drunk; but what specially impressed me were the extraordinary preparations for my reception. It was evident that I was expected.

A neat metal tea-urn was hissing away on a round table, covered with a pretty and valuable table-cloth. The tea-service blazed with cut glass, silver, and china. On another table, covered with a different kind of, but not less costly, cloth, stood dishes filled with bonbons, Kiefsky preserves of several kinds, marmoladki, jellies, jam, oranges, apples, several kinds of nuts—in fact, a complete grocer's establishment. On a third table, covered with a white cloth, were set out all sorts of light eatables—caviar, cheese, game pie, German sausages, a smoked ham, fish, and a stand of most beautiful spirit and liqueur decanters, with all sorts and kinds of drinks, green, red, brown, and golden in colour. Lastly, on a smaller table at the side, also covered with a white cloth, stood two jugs of champagne. On a little table by the sofa were three more bottles—Sauterne,



Lafite, and Cognac; these were Eliseyeff's wines, and of extra good quality. Behind the tea table sat Alexandra Semeónovna, looking very pretty and neat, although her dress was a plain one. She knew her dress suited her, and seemed proud of the knowledge. Seeing me, she rose with great solemnity. Satisfaction and happiness were lighting up her eyes and her pretty fresh face. Maslobóeff sat in a valuable silk dressing-gown, and wore a pair of beautiful Chinese slippers, and had a great deal of clean shirt front visible. He had smart studs and buttons wherever he could find a place to stick them, and his hair was "done" very carefully and in the height of the fashion.

I was so amazed to see all this, that I stood transfixed in the middle of the room with my mouth open, looking first at Maslobóeff and then at Alexandra Semeónovna, whose self-satisfaction and delight amounted almost to celestial happiness.

"What's all this, Maslobóeff?" I cried at last. "Are you expecting a lot of friends to-night?"

"Only yourself," he said, solemnly.

"What's all this for then? Why there's enough to feed a regiment!"

"And to liquor them," Maslobóeff added; "you forget the liquor, which is the chief thing."

"And all this on my account?"

"Yours and Alexandra Semeónovna's," he said, "she got all this up."

"There, I thought so," said Alexandra, flushing up; "I can't receive a guest worthily but I must catch it for my pains." She did not lose her look of intense satisfaction all the same.

"Since *earliest* morning—*earliest* morning, think of that! The instant she heard you were coming she began her preparations," said Maslobóeff, "and has been tormenting herself about it all day."

"That's not true," said Alexandra, "it was *not* from earliest morning. I began last night. You told me when you came home last night that he was coming to spend the evening, and I thought, why shouldn't we receive him properly. We live on, week after week, and never see a soul, and yet we have all sorts of nice things to show. Why shouldn't people of position when they *do* come, see that we know how to receive them."

"See what a splendid housekeeper you are, you mean,"

laughed Maslobóeff. "But think of *me*, what have *I* done to have this smart shirt and slippers and dressing gown piled on to me, and all these studs stuck in, and my hair scented—she did it all, my dear fellow, and smeared bergamot on my hair. She wanted to sprinkle some nasty scent over me, but I drew the line there. I exerted a little authority!"

"It wasn't bergamot, it was best French pomade! Judge for yourself now, Ivan Petrovitch, never a theatre or a dance do I see! He gives me lots of dresses, but what is the use of them? I get myself up in them and march up and down the room. The other day we were just off to the theatre, I was all ready and pinning on my brooch, when I see my gentleman at the wine cupboard. 'Just one glass,' he said; then he had another, then he settled to it; and not a glimpse of that theatre did we get. We never see a soul, except an occasional business caller of a morning, and then I am turned out of the room. I have thought over it for a year, and made up my mind that if ever a guest, a *real* guest, did come to see us we would give him a sight of all our fine tea-cups and tea-urns and things; I want to hear them admired. As for pomading his hair, I'm sorry I took the trouble, for the stupid old donkey isn't worth it. You see that smart dressing gown—much too good for him—it was given to him. All he cares about is his drinking; you'll see he will want you to take vodka before your tea."

"Quite true, and very right. Come along Vánia, we'll have a drain, one gold coloured one and one silver one; then our souls will be nicely freshened up, and we can settle down to a steady drink."

"I knew it," said Alexandra.

"All right, Sashenka, we'll have a cup of your mixture afterwards, with a drop of cognac in it to your health."

"There, that's just like him!" cried the indignant Alexandra; "tea at six roubles a pound—presented to us by a merchant—and he wants to drink it with nasty brandy. Don't listen to him, Ivan Petrovitch, I'll pour you out a cup of this, and you'll see what lovely tea it is," and she began fussing over her tea things. It was evident that I was expected to stay all the evening. Alexandra Semeónovna had waited a year for a guest, and was going to make the most of him; but this was not in my calculations.

"Listen, Maslobóeff," I said, sitting down, "you must

not consider me a guest, I have come on business; you had something to say to me. At half-past eight I must be off."

"Not a bit of it; you are not going to treat me and Alexandra like that. Look at her, she is stupefied with your news! And what do you suppose I'm pomaded for! Why, I've got bergamot on my hair, my good sir, think of that!"

"You will have your joke, Maslobóeff. But listen, Alexandra Semeónovna, I promise faithfully to come and dine with you next Friday. But I can't possibly stay long to-night. You had better tell me at once, Maslobóeff, what you have to say."

"Surely you can stay longer than till half-past eight," said Alexandra, plaintively, and handing me a cup of tea, almost with tears in her eyes.

"Don't bother yourself about it, Sashenka," said Maslobóeff; "it's all twaddle, he isn't going. Look here, Vania, I think you had better tell me where you are always going to. What business have *you* got on hand? You run away somewhere every day—you do no work."

"Perhaps I'll tell you afterwards. Meanwhile, just inform me what made you call at my rooms last night, when, as you remember, I had told you that I would not be at home?"

"Oh, I forgot. I wanted to talk to you about something; but I chiefly wanted to appease Alexandra. She said, 'There's an old friend, why don't you invite him here?' I assure you, my dear fellow, I have been worried about you for days. As for the bergamot stuff, it will cover a multitude of sins in the next world. To tell you the truth, I wanted just to have a chat with you; so I devised the stratagem of leaving a note to say that if you didn't come and talk about a certain subject, something dreadful would happen."

I begged him not to do that sort of thing in future, and said that I much preferred plain speaking. As for his explanation, it by no means satisfied me.

"Well, and what did you run away from me this morning for?" I asked.

"I really had business," he said.

"What, with the prince?"

"How do you like our tea," asked the honeyed voice of Alexandra Semeónovna.

"It's *splendid*, Alexandra Semeónovna," I said. "I have never tasted such tea before." She had waited five minutes

for my opinion, poor little woman, and I had forgotten all about it."

She flushed up with joy, and hastily poured me out another cup.

"The prince!" cried Maslobóeff. "I tell you, my dear sir, that prince is the greatest *humbug*. Why, I myself am a pretty fair blackguard, but for pure modesty's sake, I shouldn't like to be in his skin. And that's all I can say about him. I can't tell you any more."

"And it so happens that one of my chief reasons in coming to see you, was to ask all about him. Well, we'll talk about that afterwards. Just tell me, first of all, why you gave my Nelly those sweets last night; and why you pirouetted before her, and what you found to talk about for an hour and a half?"

"Nelly is a child, about eleven or twelve years old, who is at present staying with Ivan Petrovitch," explained Maslobóeff to Alexandra. "Look, Vánia, just look at her!" he went on, pointing with his finger at her. "Look how she flushed up when she heard I had taken sweets to a strange girl! How red she got, and how she trembled, just as if somebody had fired a pistol off. Look at her eyes, they are shining like a couple of coals! All right, Sashenka, all right. I know! You needn't try to hide it—it's jealousy. I tell you, my dear boy, if I hadn't hastened to inform her that the strange girl was eleven years old, I should have caught it in another minute—even the bergamot wouldn't have saved me."

"It won't save you now, either," and with these words, and before Maslobóeff could duck his head, she had sprung out from behind her tea-urn, caught hold of a large lock of his hair, and given it a pretty smart tug. "There!" she said, "there! you dare tell me I'm jealous, before a guest, eh? You dare, do you?"

She was as red as a turkey cock, and though she was not really angry, Maslobóeff caught it pretty hot.

"He is never ashamed of himself," Alexandra said to me. "He'll say anything."

"There, Vánia, that's the sort of life I lead. After that, I must certainly have a little vodka," said Maslobóeff, smoothing his hair, and almost running for the decanter. But Alexandra was before him. She rushed to the table, poured him out a wine glass of vodka, and handed it to him, patting his cheek

caressingly. Maslobóeff winked at me solemnly, put out his tongue, and with great solemnity emptied his glass.

"As for the sweets," he said, sitting down by me, "it is very difficult to say. I bought them the other day at a dirty little shop, when I was—well, drunk. I don't know why. Perhaps I wanted to encourage the trade of my country—I don't know! All I remember is that I was going along the road, in the condition just admitted, when I fell into the mud, and tore my hair and wept because I felt that I was good for nothing. I forgot all about the sweets which I had bought, and they remained in my pocket, and yesterday I left them on your sofa. As for the dance—well, yesterday again I was—well, drunk; and when I am in that condition, and feel happy enough, I sometimes indulge in a dance. And that's all, except that the little orphan roused pity in me, and besides, she wouldn't speak to me, as though she were angry about something or other. So I danced to cheer her up, and offered her the sweets."

"Oh!" I said. "You didn't do all this to bribe her, then, to get something out of her? You had better be frank, old fellow. You went yesterday on purpose because you knew I wasn't there; and because you wanted to find something out from the child. I know very well that you were there for an hour and a half, and told her you knew her mother, and asked her a number of questions."

Maslobóeff frowned, and then laughed slyly. "The idea wouldn't be a bad one," he said. "But no! Vania, it wasn't that! At least, I may have asked questions; and why shouldn't I! But it wasn't that. Look here, old friend," he continued, "though I am pretty drunk now, still, you can believe me when I tell you this: Maslobóeff will never deceive you with evil intent—mind, *with evil intent.*"

"And what if the intention is not evil?"

"Oh, well, not then either; but the deuce take all this—let's drink! It's a very simple matter," he went on, after draining his glass: "this Mrs. Bubuoof never had the slightest right over the child; I have found out all about it. It was no case of adoption, or anything of the sort; simply the child's mother had owed her some money, so she coolly took the child in payment. Mrs. Bubuoof may be a first-class old scoundrel, but she is a regular fool, like most women. The mother's passport was all right. Helen can live with you quite

well ; but, of course, it would be much better if some nice family would take her up seriously and adopt her. Meanwhile, it's all right ; Bubuoof can't move a finger—I'll see to that. As to the mother, I could not find out much ; she was somebody's widow—one Saltzman."

"Yes ; so Nelly told me."

"That's all right, too. And, now, Vánia," he continued, almost with solemnity, "I have to make a request. *Do* tell me what you do with yourself ? where do you go to and stay all day ? Though I have heard whispers, I don't know nearly enough about you. I want particulars."

His solemnity surprised and rather disconcerted me.

"Why ?" I asked. "What do you want to know that for ? You ask me so seriously that——"

"Look here, Vánia, I want to do you a service. If I wished to deceive you, I should extort anything I wanted to get out of you without this display of solemnity. You think I am trying to be cunning with you. Oh ! I understand—about the sweets, you know ! but let me tell you that when I talk solemnly, I mean to imply that I am interested for your sake, and not my own. Therefore, let's have no more of your suspicions, but just speak out and tell the truth."

"Well, and where's the use ? Look here, Maslobóeff, why don't you wish to tell me anything about the prince ? I *want* to know about him ; now, that *would* be a service !"

"The prince ! h'm ! well, I'll tell you openly ; it's on account of this prince that I am now putting these questions to you."

"How do you mean ?"

"Well, I observed that the prince was somehow or other mixed up in your affairs ; among other reasons for my thinking that this was the case, I give this—that he asked me about you. How he knew that I knew you is not your affair. The principal thing is, look out for this prince. Beware ! He is the traitor Judas, and worse ; therefore, when I found that you had something to do with him, I trembled for you. But I know nothing of your relations with him, and that's why I am pumping you, because I want to judge of them by your reply. Indeed, I invited you here to-day with this intent. That is the very important business I wished to speak to you about."

"At all events tell me *something*—tell me why I must beware of the prince."

"Very well, so be it. You must know I sometimes busy myself over other people's affairs, and these good people trust me because I *am* to be trusted. So you mustn't expect me to tell you, except in general terms, why this prince is such a scoundrel. But you begin and tell me about your affairs."

I judged that I need hide nothing from Maslobóeff. Natásha's affair was no secret; he might be of some service in this quarter. Of course, I steered clear of certain points in my narrative. Maslobóeff was intensely interested in all that concerned the prince; he stopped me several times, and asked no end of questions, so that by the time I had finished he had learned pretty well all the details. My narrative lasted half-an-hour.

"H'm! she's got a head on her shoulders, that girl!" Maslobóeff said. "Though she may not have made an exact estimate of the prince's action, still she saw from the very first step what sort of man she had to deal with, and promptly broke off all relations with him. Well done, Natásha Nicolaeвна! I drink to her health!" (He drank.) "Of course, she has lost the game, the prince will insist on his own way, and Aleósha will drop her, that's quite certain. I'm very sorry for old Ikménief, to have to pay ten thousand roubles to that blackguard! Who was his lawyer—himself I suppose? Oh! of course; it's always the way with these fiery, generous people; they are no use. That wasn't the way to behave with a man like the prince! I'd have got him such a legal adviser that—oh!" He banged the table with mortification.

"Well," I asked, "what about the prince now?"

"How you harp on the prince. What am I to say. I simply wanted to forewarn you against the scoundrel, so as to put you out of reach of his influence. Whoever has dealings with him is on dangerous ground. So just keep your ears open, and that's all. You thought I was going to tell you, heaven knows what awful mysteries. Evidently! you are a novelist. What's one to say about a scoundrel? A scoundrel *is* a scoundrel. Well, look here, I'll just tell you one little tale about him, of course, without names, without towns, dates, or any particulars. You know that when he was young and living on his salary as a government clerk, he married a rich merchant's daughter. Well, he did not behave very nicely towards this girl; and though we have not to do with her at present, I will just observe that all his life he has loved to go

in for the sort of little game, an example of which I am now going to describe. Well, he went abroad, and there——.”

“Wait, Maslobóeff, what year was this?”

“Just ninety-nine years and three months since. Well, when there he lured a certain girl from a certain father, and carried her off to Paris. And the way the fellow did it! The father was a sort of manufacturer, or a shareholder in some works or other. Our friend got round him somehow, and sniggled into the enterprise as a partner. Then he cheated the old man completely, and borrowed money from him. Of course, the old man took some kind of receipt; but the prince wanted to borrow the money in that kind of way that one doesn't pay it back—I have heard it described as *stealing*. Well, the old man had a pretty daughter, and this daughter was loved madly by an ideal fellow, a brother of Schiller's, a poet, and at the same time a merchant—a young visionary, in a word, a thorough German, a certain Pfefferkuchen.”

“You mean, his name was Pfefferkuchen?”

“I dare say that was his name; deuce take it, we have nothing to do with that! Well, the prince set himself to win this girl's affection, and succeeded so well that she fell madly in love with him. The prince wanted two things, first to get hold of the daughter, and next to get hold of the receipts for the money borrowed. Now, the keys of all the old man's boxes were in the young woman's pocket. The old man loved his daughter to such an extent that he would not, or could not, bring himself to let anyone marry her. He was jealous of every marriageable man about the place—he couldn't think of separation from her. He drove Pfefferkuchen away,—some young beggar of an Englishman——”

“Englishman! Why, where did all this take place?”

“Oh! I just said Englishman for fun! How you snap one up! It took place at Santa Fé de Bogota, or was it Cracow, or Nassau? Nassau I think it was; will that do for you? Well, the prince got hold of the daughter and carried her off, and the daughter, by his orders, brought away some of her father's papers. One does see love like this sometimes; and yet, good heavens! the girl was as honest and noble a girl as—and I dare say, she knew nothing about the papers she took away. One thing troubled the girl—her father's curse. So the prince stepped forward and gave her a formal legal document undertaking to marry her. And by this means he persuaded



her that they would just have a little journey together and enjoy themselves a bit, and then come back married and live *en trois* with her father, as happy as larks, and make money and so on, to all eternity. So off they went; the old man cursed his daughter, and his business smashed up. Well, Frauennilch followed her to Paris, leaving business and everything to do so; he was very much in love was Frauennilch."

"Stop! who is Frauennilch?"

"Oh, that fellow, what's his name? Feuerbach! Oh! hang him! Pfefferkuchen. Well, of course, the prince could not marry—what would Countess Clestoff say? what would Baron Pomoikin think of it?—so he must deceive her. This was not difficult, and he did it too well. First, he took to beating her; then he invited this Pfefferkuchen to the house; Pfefferkuchen went and became the girl's confidant. They would sit together for hours crying and bewailing their miseries. The prince so arranged that he came in one evening late and found them together. He immediately pretended that their intimacy had been criminal, picked a quarrel with Pfefferkuchen, swore that he had been an eye-witness of their perfidy, and kicked them both out of his front door. Then he went off to London, and she gave birth to a daughter immediately—that is, not a daughter but a son, who was christened Volódia. Well, Pfefferkuchen took care of her; he had a little money, and they went round Italy and Switzerland—all the romantic places, in fact. She did nothing but cry, and Pfefferkuchen passed his time in whimpering, and so the years went by and the girl grew. All would have been delightful for the prince but for one thing; he had not got back his document undertaking to marry her.

"'You scoundrel,' she had said to him at parting, 'you have cheated and betrayed and dishonoured me, and now you desert me, but I will not give you back your promise of marriage. Not because I would ever marry you; but because you are afraid of this document. So I shall keep it safe in my own hands.'

"In a word, she lost her temper; but the prince remained calm. It is very convenient and delightful for blackguards like that to have to deal with your exalted type of persons. They are so high-minded that they are easily duped; and again, they invariably prefer to treat their enemies with noble and generous contempt, rather than with the application of the

scourge of the law. Therefore, though this poor mother wrapped herself up in the cloak of scorn and kept the document in her pocket, the prince knew well enough that she would sooner hang herself than make use of the said document, so he was quite comfortable for the time. And though she spat—figuratively, in the scoundrel's face, there was little Volódia left on her hands; and, if she were to die, what would become of him? However, she did not think much of that, and young Brüderschaft encouraged her to leave the matter alone, too. They read Schiller together instead. However, one fine day, young Brüderschaft got ill and died."

"Do you mean Pfefferkuchen?"

"Oh, hang the fellow—yes, and she—"

"Wait a bit; how many years had they wandered about?"

"Exactly two hundred. Well, she came back to Cracow. Her father would not see her, but cursed her; she died, and the prince danced for joy. Now then, Vánia, let's have a drink."

"I suspect you are occupied about this very business for him, Maslobóeff."

"You want me to say yes, I suppose."

"But I can't see what benefit you can be here."

"Well, you see it's like this: when she came back to Madrid after her ten years' sojourning abroad, under an assumed name, the prince had to find out all about Brüderschaft and the old man, and whether she had really come back, and all about the child, and whether the mother was really dead or not, and whether there were any papers and so on—no end of things. Now one other thing; this man is the very worst kind of scoundrel, Vánia; take care what you have to do with him! And as, for Maslobóeff, this is what you must think about him: never, *never* call him a blackguard; because though he is a blackguard, possibly—where is the man who is not?—he is never a blackguard towards *you*. I am abominably drunk at this moment, but listen, if at any time, near or far away, now—or next year, it should appear to you that Maslobóeff is dissembling with you,—mark the word 'dissembling'—then you must be sure he does so without evil intent. Maslobóeff keeps watch and ward over you, so you had much better put no trust in suspicion, but come straight off and have it out frankly and in a brotherly manner with Maslobóeff himself. Now then, have a drink!"

"No thanks."

"Well, eat something."

"You must really excuse me, old fellow, I——"

"Then go along, it's a quarter to nine, so look sharp; it's quite time you went."

"How! who!" cried Alexandra Semeónovna, indignant, and almost in tears, "fancy, driving a guest away like that, you shameless tippler, you drink so much that you don't know what you say."

"All right, Sashenka, we'll stay and adore each other by ourselves. This general must be off—pardon me, Vánia, you're not a general, but I am a blackguard. Look at me, look at me, a nice sort of a state I'm in! What must you think of me, Vánia! But forgive me, old fellow, and let me weep on your bosom."

He embraced me and burst into tears. I prepared to go.

"Oh dear, oh dear," said poor Alexandra Semeónovna, almost crying for vexation, "and we had a beautiful supper ready, besides all this. Will you come for certain on Friday?"

"Yes, I really will; my word on it."

"Perhaps you're shocked at his dreadful tipsiness, Ivan Petrovitch. Don't be shocked," she continued, "he is a good, kind-hearted man and is devoted to you. He talks of you day and night now-a-days. He bought me your books—I haven't read them yet, but I shall begin to-morrow. Oh, I shall be so glad when you come. We see no one, week in and week out, and it *is* so dull. I have been listening to all your conversation, it was delightful. Good night. Friday next!"

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## CHAPTER VII.

**I** HURRIED home; Maslobóeff's tale had struck me very much. I don't know what wild thoughts didn't come into my head. As though on purpose, something awaited me at home this evening which shook me like the shock of a galvanic battery.

Exactly opposite the gate of my house there was a lamp-

post. Hardly had I reached the gate when suddenly a strange-looking figure rushed to me from the lamp-post—some living being, but frightened, trembling, half mad; and with a cry this figure caught my hands. A sickening dread came over me, it was Nelly.

“Nelly!” I cried, “what *is* the matter?”

“Up there! He’s sitting there, in your room!”

“Who? Come, let’s go and see together.”

“No, no, I won’t go in! I’ll wait outside till he comes out. I won’t go in!”

I went upstairs and opened the door with a strange feeling of presentiment. Yes, there was the prince. He was seated at the table, reading a novel; at least, the book was open before him.

“Ivan Petrovitch!” he cried joyfully; “I am delighted to see you back. I was just thinking that I must be going. I have been waiting more than an hour. I promised the countess to-day, at her most instant and urgent request, to bring you to see her this evening. She *begged* me to bring you. She is most anxious to make your acquaintance. Therefore as you had given me permission to call, I came here myself, early, to make sure I should find you at home, and to beg you to come with me. Imagine my despair when I got here, and your little servant told me you were not at home. Just think of it! and I had promised the countess, solemnly, to bring you. ‘What was to be done?’ I said to myself. ‘I’ll just wait a quarter of an hour.’ And I took up your novel. Well, away flew the quarter of an hour, and many others too! Why, Ivan Petrovitch, it is downright *perfection*. You actually drew tears from my eyes; and I don’t often weep, you know.”

“So you want me to go with you! I’m afraid I can’t possibly do so.”

“Oh, do for goodness’ sake come! Why, what should I do if I turned up without you! and I’ve waited an hour and a half! Besides, I must, I really *must* have a talk with you. *You* know what about! You know the ins and outs of that business better than I do. Perhaps we may be able to settle something between us. Think over it, and come. Don’t refuse me, I entreat you!”

I judged that sooner or later I must go. Allowing that Natásha was alone, and needed me, still, she herself had begged me to take the first opportunity of making Kátia’s

acquaintance. Perhaps Aleósha was there too! I knew that Natásha would have no real peace till I went and told her all about Kátia. So I determined to go. But I was not comfortable with regard to Nelly.

"Excuse me a minute," I said to the prince, and I went out on to the staircase. There I found Nelly standing in a dark corner.

"Why don't you want to come in, Nelly?" I asked her. "What did he do to you—what did he say?"

"Nothing. I don't want to go in; I'm afraid. I won't go in," she repeated.

Entreaties were of no avail; so I arranged with her that as soon as I passed her with the prince, she was to run back and shut herself in, "And don't let anyone in, Nelly, however much they may beg you to open to them."

"Are you going with him?"

"Yes."

She shivered and took hold of my hand, as though she were entreating me not to go; but I didn't say a word. I determined to ask her all about the mystery to-morrow.

Having apologised to the prince, I began dressing; but he hastened to assure me that I needn't make myself smart. But seeing that I had a dress coat, he added, "One can't altogether neglect the etiquette of society, however, can one?" He seemed pleased that I had a dress coat.

We went out. I left him on the stairs for a moment, and going back found that Nelly had slipped in already. I said good-bye to her once more. She was dreadfully agitated; her face looked quite blue. I didn't like leaving her alone; I was afraid of her condition.

"What a strange little servant you have," said the prince, when I joined him on the staircase. "That little girl *is* your servant, is she not?"

"Well, no! she is staying with me only for a little while."

"A strange child she is. I feel sure that she is mad. Fancy, she began to speak to me quite nicely, but when she looked at me, she rushed up to me, cried out, trembled, caught hold of me, and tried to say something or other, but couldn't. I confess, I was quite alarmed. I felt inclined to run away from her; but thank goodness *she* ran away instead. I was quite amazed! How can you put up with that sort of thing?"

"She is subject to epileptic fits," I said.

"Oh! well, then, of course, it is not surprising. She has fits, has she? Oho!"

One thing struck me here: It was that Maslobóeff's visit to me of yesterday, when he knew I would be out—that my visit to Maslobóeff to-day—that Maslobóeff's story of this evening, let out by him while intoxicated, and, I thought, unwillingly—that his invitation to me to come at seven o'clock, and his entreaty to me not to believe him capable of deception—and the fact that the prince had been to see me and waited an hour and a half, when he very likely was aware of my being at Maslobóeff's—and that Nelly had rushed away from him into the street—that all these things were connected together in some way or other. If so, there was enough to think about!

At the gate stood the prince's carriage. We got in and drove away.

## CHAPTER VIII.

THE house was not far off, at the Torgovoi Bridge. The prince and I did not speak for the first minute or so. I kept thinking, "What will he say? Will he question me and pump me?" However, when he did begin, he went straight to business.

"There is one thing I feel particularly worried about," he said. "I have long wanted to surrender my right to the moneys gained by me from Ikménief in our lawsuit—ten thousand roubles. I wanted to ask your advice. How is it to be managed? How can I arrange so that Ikménief keeps the money?"

I thought to myself, "As if you want any advice as to such a point as that. You must be joking." However, I answered in all simplicity, "I really don't know, Prince. If there is any information I can give you in regard to Natásha Nicolaevna's affair I am very much at your service; but as to the matter you speak of you know far more about it than I do."

"Not at all; not at all. You are a great friend of the family,

and very likely Natásha herself has often told you her ideas on this subject, and that would be a great guide to me. You might help me *so* much ; and the affair is difficult enough to manage. I am ready to yield on this point ; more, I am determined to yield—you understand—however other matters at issue may end. But *how* to surrender my right to this money, that is the question. The old man is as proud as he is obstinate ; perhaps my generosity may offend him and he may throw the money back in my face."

"Excuse me, but whose property do you consider the money to be ; yours or his ?"

"Well, as I won the suit, of course the money is mine."

"Yes, but from the point of view of honour ?"

"Mine, of course," he said, evidently piqued by my want of ceremony. "However, I suppose you do not know the essential points of the business. I do not accuse the old man of intentional deceit, nor, I admit, did I ever deem him guilty of it. He insisted on marching deliberately to his own discomfiture. He was guilty merely of negligence in some of the affairs entrusted to him, for the results of which negligence he was, by our agreement, responsible. But as you very likely are aware the trouble was not there—that was not the sore point ; the real cause of the whole question was that quarrel of ours and the mutual insults we heaped upon each other—in a word, our wounded self-love. I dare say I should never have thought of those wretched ten thousand roubles but for that quarrel. But, of course, you know all about the occurrence I admit that I was suspicious, and perhaps wrongly so—wrongly then, of course—but I was not aware of it at the time, and being annoyed and offended by his rudeness I seized the opportunity of this excuse to commence a lawsuit against him. All this may appear to you as not the most high-minded conduct on my part. I do not justify myself ; all I wish to remark is that anger and wounded self-love do not necessitate the absence of high-mindedness, and— But I hardly knew the Ikméniefs, you must remember, and besides, I believed all the reports about Aleósha and the old man's daughter, and therefore it was not inconsistent to believe equally in the possibility of Ikménief having robbed me, as reported by tittle tattlers. But all this is superfluous. The question is, how am I to act now ? Give up the right to the money ? Very well ; but if I do so, and still hold that my claim was just, then it simply amounts to

making him a present of the money. Add to this difficulty the strained position of affairs as regards Natásha, and—well, he is sure to hurl the money back in my face.”

“You see you use the expression ‘hurl’; consequently you consider the man honest, and therefore you must be perfectly convinced that he did *not* steal your money. And if so, why can't you go straight to him and tell him that you consider your claim was unjust? That would be the high-minded thing to do, and then very likely Ikménief might find himself able to take his own money back again.”

“H'm, *his own* money; that's just it. Now look what you want me to do. I am to go to this man and tell him that I consider my claim on him to have been unlawful. ‘Oh! then why did you put the claim forward when you knew it was unjust?’ So he and everyone else will ask me; and I have not deserved this, because I made my claim with perfect legality. I never said or wrote anywhere that he had robbed me; but as for his carelessness and neglect and inability to do his work—of that I was and still am quite persuaded. This money is undoubtedly *my own*, and therefore it is a little too much to expect me to draw down his slander on my head; and, in fact, as I said before, the old man brought his trouble on himself, and you expect me to beg his pardon for it, which is decidedly hard on me.”

“It seems to me that if two men want to make up a quarrel——”

“What? You think it ought to be easy enough? No, my dear friend, sometimes it is by no means so easy, especially when——”

“Especially when there are special circumstances to complicate matters. Yes; there I quite agree with you, Prince. The affair of Natásha and your son's marriage ought to be settled at once so far as *you* are concerned, and settled, too, to the entire satisfaction of the Ikméniefs. Only when you have done this can you freely communicate your views about the lawsuit to the old man; but now, while nothing whatever is settled, there is but one road open to you—to admit the injustice of your claim, and admit it not only freely, but, if necessary, publicly. There you have my opinion. I give it frankly because you asked for it, and probably do not wish me to deceive you. And this fact emboldens me to ask you, why are you so anxious to return this money to the Ikméniefs?”



If you think your claim was just why give up the money? Excuse my curiosity, but this question is so intimately connected with other questions that——”

“And what do you think?” the prince asked suddenly, and as though he had not heard a word of my question. “Would Ikmé refuse this money if it were offered him without a word of explanation or apology?”

“Of course he would!” I felt quite hot and even trembled with indignation. This insolently sceptical question gave me a shock of disgust just as though the prince had suddenly spat in my face. And this feeling of disgust was intensified by the rude, aristocratic manner of the prince in not answering my question, but substituting another of his own, thereby giving me to understand that I was exceeding the bounds of familiarity in putting such questions to him. I had always loathed these aristocratic tricks of manner, and had done my best to cure Aleósha of them in the past.

“H’m! you are a little too warm; these sort of things do not always go in the way you seem to think right, in the *world*,” the prince quietly observed, in answer to my heated exclamation. “I think Natásha might partly decide the question; tell her so. She might give her people some good advice on the subject”

“Not by any means,” I replied, rudely; “you were good enough to interrupt what I was about to say a minute or two ago. I wished to observe that Natásha Nicolaevna will understand very well, that if you return this money to her father in an underhand insincere way, and without any apology, as you call it, you desire to imply that you are paying her father for his daughter and are paying *her* for Aleósha; in other words, that you are glossing over with a sum of money what——”

“H’m! So that’s how you understand my character, my gentle Ivan Petrovitch!” The prince laughed. Why did he laugh? I wondered.

“But,” he continued, “we have plenty to say to each other yet, and there’s no time now. I will only beg one thing of you—to understand *this*: that the matter directly concerns Natásha and her future, and that that future depends partly upon what you and I may decide together, and upon the ground we take up. *You* are a necessity in this affair, you must see that; and therefore if you continue to feel attached to Natásha you cannot refuse to have it all out with me, however little sympathy you may feel for me personally. But here we are; so *à bientôt!*”

## CHAPTER IX.

THE countess lived on a grand scale; her rooms were elegantly and comfortably furnished, but not gaudily. She had rented the lodging for a season, and I had heard that she was going to her own estate in Simbirsk for the summer, and that the prince was to escort her. I thought with dread of the question as to what Aleósha would do—how he would act, when Kátia went away with the countess. I had not dared to talk to Natisha of this yet, but from certain hints which she let drop she appeared to have heard the rumour. However, she said nothing about it, and kept her sufferings to herself as usual.

The countess received me well, courteously gave me her hand, and said that she had long wished to know me. She poured me out a cup of tea, from a beautiful silver tea-urn near which were seated the prince, myself, and an elderly and extremely aristocratic-looking individual, highly starched, and of engaging manners; he had the appearance of a diplomatist. This guest was apparently much honoured. The countess, not having returned from abroad very long, had not as yet made any very important conquests, nor had she consolidated her position in society as she had hoped; and this visitor was the only one who came in during the evening. I looked for Kátia; she was in another room with Aleósha, but, hearing of our arrival, came in at once to see us. The prince kissed her hand affectionately, and the countess introduced me.

I gazed at Kátia with the most impatient curiosity. She was a gentle-looking little blonde, dressed in white; she was not tall, and her face had a quiet, peaceful expression; her eyes were perfectly blue, as Aleósha had said, and she was pretty, as all youth is pretty, but no more. I had expected to find the perfection of loveliness, but she had no real beauty. The regular and delicately traced oval of her face, her fairly good features, and her nice hair were all well enough, but if I had met her anywhere I should have passed her by without particularly noticing her. However, I had time to study her

face more carefully during the evening, and it improved upon acquaintance. The mere manner of giving me her hand, looking into my eyes with grave, concentrated interest, and without a word, struck me very forcibly. I could not help smiling at her; it was so evident that the little being before me was innocent and pure of heart. The countess watched her intently. Having shaken hands with me, Kátia hurried off to the other end of the room, and sat down there with Aleósha.

Aleósha, when he greeted me, took the opportunity of whispering, "I'm only here for a *minute*; you know, and then I'm off *there*."

The diplomatist (I don't know his name) was holding forth calmly and with majesty while the countess listened with great deference. The prince, too, listened with an approving and flattering smile. This orator often held forth to the prince as one of his best listeners. These good people gave me my cup of tea and then left me in peace, for which I felt deeply gratified.

I took the opportunity of studying the countess. She pleased me—I confess it, though I did not wish to be pleased—at first. Her face was very fresh-looking, and it struck me that when young she must have been very beautiful; she did not look much more than about twenty-eight however. Her hair was dark and thick, and her expression was distinctly *gracious*, though one detected an undercurrent of irony. She was however, evidently on her good behaviour, just now, and her face looked clever and intelligent, as well as kind and full of animation.

She sat by the prince, whose influence over her was of the greatest. I knew that there had been, or was, a liaison between them, and had heard that the prince was not a particularly jealous lover; and I thought, and think now, that there must have been some other connection between them besides that of love—some mysterious mutual obligation founded on financial questions; something or other there must have been. I also knew that the prince was at present dreadfully tired of her, but that their intimacy was not broken off. Probably Kátia was the principal tie between them at this time, and Aleósha had told me that the prince had opposed the countess's wish to marry himself, and had persuaded her to work with him for the union of Aleósha and Kátia. Aleósha told me further that he had observed that the prince, though he seemed to have the

countess under his thumb, still had some mysterious reason for *fearing* her. I heard afterwards that the prince was most anxious to find her a husband, and was sending her off to the Simbirsk estate, on purpose to see if some eligible gentleman might not turn up in the provinces.

I sat and listened, and wondered when I should have an opportunity of speaking to Kátia face to face. The diplomatist was holding forth about some new reforms in home policy, and whether we ought to be afraid of them or not; he spoke quietly, lengthily, and with the insistence and conviction of the powers that be. He talked well, but his ideas disgusted me. He argued that since reforms were sure to lead to grief eventually, the sooner they arrived at the full length of their tether the better it would be for all parties. "They can't do without us," he said (referring, of course, to his own particular corner of society); "no society has ever stood which excluded us. We shall not lose—we shall and must gain whatever happens. Our device at this moment should be, '*Pire ça va, mieux ça est.*'"

The prince smiled a smile of acquiescence which disgusted me; the orator seemed much pleased with himself; on my part, I was foolish enough to conceive the wild idea of answering him, but luckily Aleósha saved me. He came up quietly and touched my shoulder, begging me to come and have a couple of words with him. I guessed that Kátia had sent him, and so it proved. In another minute I was sitting beside her. For the first few moments we stared at each other without a word from either side; but I felt that Kátia, if she once began to talk, was the kind of girl who could go on all night. The "five or six hours' conversation" of which Aleósha had spoken, had thrown a strong light on this little lady's character. Aleósha sat by, and waited very impatiently to see how we should commence our conversation.

"Well, why don't you speak?" he asked. "Here you are met at last, and you both sit as quiet as mice."

"Oh, Aleósha, don't," said Kátia. "Ivan Petrovitch," she continued, "you and I have so much to talk about that the difficulty is to know where to begin. We are making each other's acquaintance much too late, we should have met sooner; but I have known you, oh! a long time, and I did so want to see you, I very nearly wrote to you."

"What about?" I asked, smiling involuntarily.

"Oh, there was a good deal to write about I assure you," she said seriously, "if only to ask you whether it is the fact, as Aleósha declares, that Natásha Nicolaevna is not offended when he leaves her alone so long? I *cannot* understand how a man can go on like that. What are you here for *now*, for instance?" she added, to Aleósha.

"Oh, goodness! I'm going directly. I told you I should only stay a minute, I just want to hear you two begin to talk and then I'm off, there!"

"He's *always* like that," she said to me, blushing slightly, and pointing to Aleósha with her finger. "He says he'll only stay a minute and sits on and on till it's midnight and too late to go to her. 'She won't be angry,' he says, 'because she's so good,' that's the way he argues. Do you think it right, now, and generous?"

"Well, perhaps I had better go," he said sulkily, "but I *would* like to stay a little longer."

"But you mustn't, for we have a great deal to speak about privately. Now don't be cross, it's absolutely necessary, you know."

"Oh! of course, if it *must* be, it must, there's nothing to be cross about anyhow. I'll just call in at Levinka's for one minute, and then go to her. By-the-bye, Vánia," he said, taking his hat, "have you heard that my father wants to renounce his right to the money awarded to him in the lawsuit with Ikménief?"

"Yes; he told me so."

"Isn't it noble and generous of him? Kátia here won't believe that it's generous. Talk it over with her, Vánia. Goodnight Kátia, don't you think that I do not love Natásha. I can't make out why you all try to tie me down so with Natásha; why, she knows that I love her, and she trusts me. I love her without conditions or anything; I don't know how I love her, but simply that I *do* love her. And therefore nobody need worry me about it, just as though I were to blame in the matter. Now then, Kátia, here's Vánia, just ask him whether Natásha isn't very jealous; and though she loves me very much, whether there is not a great deal of selfishness in her love, because she never wants to sacrifice anything for my sake."

"What?" I asked in amazement, for I could not believe my ears.

“What are you talking about, Aleósha?” said, almost cried, Kátia.

“Well, what is there wonderful about that? Vánia knows. She wants me to be with her continually, at least, if she doesn't say so in so many words, she shows very plainly that she expects it of me.”

“Aren't you ashamed of yourself?” said Kátia, all flushed with indignation.

“What is there to be ashamed about? What a funny girl you are, Kátia? Really, I love her much better than she thinks; and if she loved me properly, as I love *her*, she would certainly sacrifice a little of her pleasure to mine. Of course she lets me go, but I can always see by her face that she doesn't want to, and that's the same as if she didn't let me go at all.”

“No, no,” cried Kátia, looking at me with her eyes blazing with anger, “admit, Aleósha, admit this minute that your father has been putting you up to this, and don't you try to deceive me, for I know when you try that on, at once. Yes or no? come!”

“Yes; he certainly did,” said Aleósha, confused. “What of that? He spoke to me so kindly and friendly to-day, and did nothing but praise Natásha. I was quite surprised, she has insulted him so deeply, and he speaks so kindly of her.”

“And you believed him?” I cried. “*You*, for whom she has given up all that she *can* give, and even to-day her only trouble was how to allow you to get away to see Miss Kátia here, without hurting your feelings. She told me this herself, this morning. And you go away, and the first thing you do is listen to false calumnies about her. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?”

“Ungrateful creature!” added Kátia; “but he is never ashamed of anything;” and she made a gesture with her hand expressive of the hopeless depth of ingratitude into which Aleósha had sunk.

“Good gracious! Why do you go on like this,” said Aleósha, in plaintive accents; “you are always the same, Kátia! You never think anything good of me. I don't say a word about you, Vánia! You think I don't love Natásha! I didn't mean that she was selfish, exactly; but that she loves me too much—it takes her out of all bounds, and then it isn't pleasant for either of us. As to my father influencing me against her, he never could, even if he wished. I shall not give in to him.

He did not call her selfish ; he said exactly what I have just said, about her loving me too much ; so much that it amounts to egotism, and that it will become worse and worse. He didn't say all this to disparage Natásha ; on the contrary, he saw in her a love which passed all bounds, and which she indulged to an impossible extent."

But Kátia interrupted him, and would not allow him to finish. She began to reproach him, and to prove to him that his father had been praising Natásha simply to impose upon him with assumed goodwill ; and that the prince's object was to break off his connection with Natásha by imperceptibly influencing him against her. She warmly and cleverly pointed out how truly Natásha must love him ; how no love could forgive such conduct as his ; and that the really selfish one was himself. Little by little Kátia brought him first into a condition of piteous melancholy, and then into abject remorse and penitence. He sat by us, with his eyes fixed on the ground, saying not a word, thoroughly vanquished, and with an expression of real suffering on his face. But Kátia was un pitying. I watched her with the greatest interest. I wanted to study this remarkable girl's character as quickly as possible. She was only a child ; but a child of convictions, and principles, and of passionate love for goodness and justice. She belonged to the class of *thinking children*, of which our Russian families have many specimens ; she had evidently thought a great deal.

It would have been a most interesting experiment to examine this girl's head, and to observe how childish ideas were there intermingled with grave and serious convictions and observations of life. She loved thinking and searching for the truth, and was so ingenuous withal, and so little a pedant, that at the first glance one could not help loving this originality in her, and acquiescing in it. I thought of Levinka and Borinka, and it seemed to me that it was all perfectly consistent with the order of things.

A strange fact was, that though I had not recognised any beauty in her face, yet now I thought her more and more lovely and attractive every minute. This naïve mixture of child and thoughtful woman, this childish and absolutely sincere thirst for truth and justice, and unfailing faith in the aspirations which she felt within herself—all this lighted up her face with the beautiful beams of sincerity, and gave her a sort of exalted spiritual beauty, which was not the sooner forgotten because

her ordinary looks and expressions did not share it. I saw that Aleósha must inevitably fall in love with her. Since he could not think for himself he would always love those who could both think and even *will* for him, and Kátia had taken him under her tutorship.

He had a generous heart, and he attached himself at once and permanently to everything upright and lovely, and Kátia was an example of all that was possible in the way of truth and childish sincerity and uprightness. He had not a particle of will, while she had a great deal, and strong will withal; and Aleósha could only attach himself to those who could rule and command him. Natásha had had such power over him in the spring of their intimacy; but Kátia had the pre-eminence over Natásha in this, that she was herself a child, and goodness knows how long she would not remain one. This childishness of hers, together with her clever intellect, and, at the same time, a certain absence of judgment, seemed to bring her more on a level with Aleósha. He felt this, and therefore Kátia attracted him more and more. I feel sure that when they had their long *tête-à-tête* conversations, side by side with Kátia's high flown propaganda speeches would come talk of dolls and playthings; and although Kátia evidently scolded Aleósha very often, and had him quite under her thumb, still he must have found it easier with her than with Natásha. They were a better pair, and that is the chief thing.

"That's enough, Kátia; all right," said Aleósha, "you are right, as usual; and the reason is that your soul is purer than mine." He got up and gave her his hand. "And now I shall go straight off and see her, and I won't call in at Levinka's."

"Why should you? There's no object in your calling there. As for your listening to me and going straight away, it is very nice of you."

"And you are a thousand times nicer," said the melancholy Aleósha. "Vánia, may I say two words to you?"

We went a couple of paces away. "Vánia," he whispered, "I have been most shamefully wicked to-day, before all the world, and especially before those two. My father introduced me to Alexandrina, a most charming French girl, and I—well, I was attracted by her, and—well, I am not worthy to be with Kátia or Natásha. Good-night, Vánia."

"He is so good and generous," Kátia began hurriedly, when I sat down by her again; "but we'll talk about him another



time. Just now we must begin by making our conditions of friendship. What do you think of the prince?"

"I think him a very bad man."

"So do I; so we agree on that point. Now, then, about Natásha. Do you know, Ivan Petrovitch, I am quite in the dark; I have been waiting for you as for the light. Do tell me all about it, for at present I have to guess all the chief features of the story, because it is Aleósha who tells me my news; there is no one else from whom I can find out anything. Now, tell me, first and foremost, and this is the chief point: Do you think Aleósha and Natásha will be happy together or not? I *must* know this first of all, because until I do I cannot decide on my own course of action."

"But how am I to tell you such a thing for certain?"

"Of course, you can't be certain," she said; "but tell me what you think about it. You are a clever man, I know that."

"My opinion is, that they can never be happy together."

"And why so?"

"Because they are not suited to each other."

"I thought it must be so," she said, and sat awhile in anxious thought, with her hands folded.

"Tell me more details. Listen! I want terribly to see Natásha, because we have a great deal that we ought to say to each other, and I believe we shall be able to settle the matter between us. I always imagine Natásha to myself as most intellectual, serious, just, and very pretty. Is it so?"

"It is."

"I was sure of it. Well, now, if she be so, how could she fall in love with Aleósha, who is such a regular *boy*? Do explain this to me! I often wonder!"

"I cannot explain it, Katerina Feodorovna; love has no laws. True, he *is* a child, but you know how a child can be beloved." My heart softened towards this girl, with her deep blue, serious eyes fixed in intensest interest on my face. "And the less a child Natásha is, the more seriously and speedily would she fall in love with him. He is honest, true, ingenuous, and sometimes delightfully naïve; perhaps she fell in love with him out of a sort of pity, who knows? High-souled creatures do love lower beings out of compassion sometimes. However, I cannot explain the matter, and therefore I refer the question back to yourself; you love him yourself, don't you?"

I put this inquiry boldly, and felt confident that by the suddenness of it I should avoid disconcerting the absolute purity of this young and candid soul.

"Before heaven, I cannot tell yet," she answered, very quietly, looking brightly into my eyes; "but I *think* I love him very much."

"There, you see! and can *you* explain why you love him?"

"There is no falseness in him," she replied, thoughtfully; "and when he looks straight into my eyes and says something, while looking like that, it is very sweet to me. But listen, Ivan Petrovitch, here am I talking like this to you; I am a girl, and you are a man. Ought I to do this? Is it right?"

"Why, what's the harm of it?"

"That's it; I don't see any myself, but they" (nodding at the countess and her group) "would certainly say it is wrong. Are they right, do you think?"

"No; your conscience doesn't tell you that you are doing wrong, and therefore——"

"Yes; that's what I always do," she said. Evidently she was anxious to confide in me as much as possible. "Whenever I feel disturbed about anything, I always ask my heart, and if my heart tells me it's all right, then I know I am safe. That is how one ought to act, I'm sure. And I am speaking to you openly like this because, in the first place, I know you to be a good man, and secondly, because I have heard your former history—about you and Natásha, before Aleósha came in; and oh! how I cried when I was told about it."

"Who told you the story?"

"Aleósha, of course; he cried himself when he spoke about it; it was very nice of him; I liked it. I think he loves you much better than you love him, Ivan Petrovitch. I like when he does that sort of thing. Another reason why I speak to you quite openly is, because you are a wise man, and may very likely be able to give me good advice."

"And how do you know that I am so wise as all that?"

"Well, never mind about all that. Let's consider the chief point now. I cannot help knowing, Ivan Petrovitch, that I am Natásha's rival. Now, how am I to act? That is why I asked you whether they would be happy together. I think of all this day and night. Natásha's position is dreadful, dreadful! I think he has quite ceased to love her, and that he loves me more and more; isn't it so?"

"I'm afraid you are right."

"He is not deceiving her, for he does not know it himself. But *she* knows it well enough. How she must suffer!"

"Well, what do you propose to do, Miss Kátia?"

"I have several projects," she said, seriously; "and meanwhile I get more and more bewildered. I have awaited you most impatiently, hoping that you might help me to decide. You know all about it so much better than I do. [I always think of you as a kind of god.] This is how I judged at first: if they love one another, they must be happy, and must remain so; and I must help them at the sacrifice of myself."

"I know you sacrificed yourself."

"Yes; I did. But when he kept coming to see me time after time, and his love grew greater and greater, I began to think to myself, shall I sacrifice myself or not? All this is very bad; isn't it?"

"It's natural," I said, "it must be, and therefore you are not to blame!"

"I don't think so! You say so because you are kind-hearted. But I'm afraid my heart is not perfectly clean in the matter. If it were, I should know how to decide. However—afterwards I learned more about the relations between them, from the prince, from mamma, and from Aleósha; and I guessed that they were not suited to one another, which you have now confirmed. This made me think all the more. What shall I do now? Why, if they are to be unhappy, they had much better separate; so I determined to ask you for full particulars about the whole question and then to pay Natásha a visit myself, and settle it all with her."

"But how can you decide it? That's the question!"

"I shall tell her: 'You love this boy more than anything; therefore, you ought to value his happiness above your own; therefore, you are bound to release him from his engagement and to separate.'"

"Yes; that's all very well; but it's a pleasant sort of thing for her to bear! and supposing that she agrees with you, do you think she will have strength to carry it out?"

"That's what I think of day and night;" and she burst into tears, "you don't know how sorry I am for Natásha!" She sobbed, her lips trembling with her emotion.

There was no reply to be made to this remark, and I was silent. Looking at her, I, too, felt inclined to cry for very love.

What a darling child this was! I did not ask her why she thought she was more fitted to make Aleósha happy than Natásha was.

"Do you like music?" she asked me suddenly, still sobbing.

"Yes," I said, with some surprise.

"If there were time I would play you Beethoven's Third Concerto, there are all these various emotions to be found in that; but I'll show you another time, we must go on talking now."

We began to consult how best to arrange for her to see Natásha. She told me that she was very carefully looked after, and that though her step-mother was fond of and very kind to her, yet she would never think of allowing her to make Natásha's acquaintance; so she must manage it secretly. She went out walking every day with the countess, she told me; and if the countess couldn't go, from headache or anything, then the old French companion took her out; but the latter was ill just now, and, therefore, when next her step-mother had a headache she would manage to get away. She could easily get over the old French body, who was a kind old thing; but it was impossible to tell Natásha beforehand what day she would come.

"If you make Natásha's acquaintance," I said, "you will certainly not repent it. She herself is very anxious to know you, and she ought to know you, too, if only that she may see whom she is giving Aleósha up to. Do not disturb yourself about all this too much; time will decide it all for you, if necessary. You are going to the country, are you not?"

"Yes," she said, "in a month; the prince insists upon this."

"Do you think that Aleósha will go with you?"

"I was just thinking of that, too," she said, gazing fixedly at me. "I suppose he *will* go!"

"Oh yes; he's sure to go!"

"Good heavens! what will be the upshot of all this! Listen, Ivan Petrovitch, I shall write and tell you about everything—long letters and frequent ones. I shall worry you with correspondence. You'll come and see us often, here, won't you?"

"I can't promise; it depends upon circumstances. Perhaps I shall not be able to come at all."

"Why?"

"Well, there are several things that my coming must depend on; first of all, my relations with the prince."

“Oh! that dishonest creature!” said Kátia, with decision. “Do you know what, Ivan Petrovitch—what if I came to you? Would that be right or not?”

“What do you think yourself?”

“All right, I think,” she said, smiling; “I would call on you, you know. I must tell you, that besides admiring you very much, I am very fond of you, and one can learn so much from you. Oh yes! I love you very much. It’s no shame to speak like this, is it?”

“Shame! of course not. Why, you are as dear to me already as though we were near relations!”

“Do you care to be my friend?”

“Yes, yes; indeed!” I replied.

“Those good people would certainly say that it is shameful and dreadfully wrong for a young girl to behave like this,” she said, nodding towards the tea-table once more. I may remark here that I believe the prince left us together on purpose to talk our fill.

“I know very well,” she resumed, a minute afterwards “that the prince wants to get hold of my money. They think me a mere child, and, in fact, they tell me that I am in so many words; but I am of a different opinion. I am not a child. Remarkable people they are; they behave just like children themselves. What on earth are they always busying themselves about?”

“Miss Kátia,” I said, “I forgot to ask you who are Levinka and Borinka, whom Aleósha so often goes to see?”

“Distant relations of mine, very clever and very honest boys; but they talk too much. I know them!” and she laughed.

“Is it true that you intend giving them a million roubles some day?”

“Well, I don’t know. I don’t mind sacrificing the million. What should I want all these huge sums for? But they worry one about it till it becomes unbearable; and assume that I have determined to sacrifice the money—some years hence it will be. Well, they are all hard at it now, dividing, distributing, awarding, quarrelling as to how it had better be spent—they all seem to be in such a hurry; yet they are all true, good-hearted, and intelligent people. They are learning to be useful fellows, and that’s better than the way most other people live, isn’t it?”

And so on; we talked a great deal. She gave me almost a

minute history of her life, and listened with the greatest avidity to what I had to tell her about myself. She continually begged me to tell her more and more about Aleósha and Natásha. It was twelve o'clock when the prince came up and informed me that it was time to go. I said good-bye. Kátia pressed my hand very warmly, and looked at me most expressively. The countess asked me to come again, and I took my leave, going out with the prince.

I cannot refrain from making a strange, and perhaps, quite inappropriate remark here. I carried away from my three hours' conversation with Kátia the full and deep conviction that she was so absolutely a child that she had no idea whatever of any mysterious connection between the male and the female. This circumstance gave an unusual and comical aspect to some of her arguments and deductions, and, generally, to the serious tone which she adopted in speaking of many important subjects.

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## CHAPTER X.

"DO you know what?" said the prince, as we seated ourselves in his carriage. "I think a little supper would be a good thing. What do you say?"

"I really don't know, prince," I said hesitatingly. "I never eat supper."

"Of course, we'll have a *talk* after supper," he added, looking fixedly and slyly at me.

It was strange; he wanted to speak out, I thought, and that's just what I wanted myself. I consented.

"Drive to B——'s, Great Morskaya," he said to the driver.

"What, a restaurant?" I asked, with surprise.

"Certainly," he said. "I seldom sup at home. Surely you will allow me to invite you as my guest?"

"But I tell you, I never do eat supper."

"Oh just once in a way make an exception. I ask you as an exception."

That meant "I'll pay for you." I felt sure he added it on purpose. Well, I decided to go, but to pay for myself at the

restaurant. The prince engaged a private room, and very deliberately, and with evident knowledge of the subject, ordered two or three dishes. They were expensive dishes, and the bottles of good wine which he told the waiter to bring were also expensive. All that sort of thing was far out of reach of my pocket. I looked at the menu, and asked for half a partridge and a glass of Lafite. The prince immediately fired up.

"You don't wish to be my guest! Excuse me, my young friend, but it is a little absurd; in fact, it's ridiculous scrupulousness, mere petty self-love on your part. I assure you you are wounding my feelings."

I stuck to my point all the same.

"Well, do as you like," he added, "I don't compel you. Now tell me, Ivan Petrovitch, am I to speak to you with friendly candour?"

"Pray do so."

"Well, let me tell you then that this over-scrupulousness will injure you, as all your class are injured continually by the same kind of thing. You are a literary man; you ought to know the world, but you don't go out and learn it. I'm not now alluding to that bit of partridge; but you eschew all relations with men of my class of society, and that is distinctly injurious to yourself, besides which you sacrifice what I may call a career by this abstinence from society. Surely you ought to know something of the things you describe in your novels? You bring in counts and princes and boudoirs and so on: but your principal actors are poor ragged wretches, fiery officers, government employés, and the like. I know all about it."

"But you are making a slight error, prince. If I do not desire to move in the exalted circle which you adorn, known as the 'upper classes,' it is because, firstly, the upper classes bore me so dreadfully; and, secondly, I have nothing to do with them. I do go out sometimes, however."

"Yes, once a year to Prince R——'s; it was there I met you. The rest of the year you clothe yourself in democratic pride and shut yourself up in your attics. Not that you all do it, however, for there are some inveterate claimants, who are always bothering one."

"May I ask you, prince, to change the subject, and to keep clear of us and our attics in your future remarks?"

"Oh, good gracious! now *you're* offended! You told me yourself that I might speak with friendly candour! But for-

give me! I have as yet done nothing to gain your friendship. This wine is not at all bad; try some."

He poured me out a little from his bottle.

"You see, my dear Ivan Petrovitch, I quite understand that it is not good form to push one's friendship down other people's throats. We are not all rude or impertinent to your class, as you imagine. I understand also, very clearly, that you are sitting here with me now, not out of any sympathy with myself, but simply because I promised to *talk* to you; am I right?" He burst out laughing. "And as you are watching the interests of a certain individual you are naturally anxious to hear what I have to say to you, eh?" The prince smiled mischievously.

"You are not mistaken," I said, impatiently. I saw that he was one of those people who, so soon as they have another person ever so slightly in their power, lose no time in showing their victim that this is the case. I was distinctly in his power; for I could not go away without hearing all that he had to say for himself, and he knew it. His tone had changed quite suddenly, and grew from this moment more and more insolently familiar and sarcastic. "You are right, prince," I continued, "I came to hear your explanations, otherwise, I confess, I should not be sitting here so late."

I wanted to say, "otherwise I should not be sitting with you at all," but I changed my mind—not out of fear, but thanks to my confounded delicacy and refinement. It is not so easy to be rude to a man to his face, though he may deserve it ever so much, and though, one may feel as I did, so strongly inclined to say it. I think the prince read these thoughts in my face, for he looked ironically at me during the whole of my remark, as though amused at my youthful simplicity and as though he wanted to provoke me by his gaze, which said plainly enough, "Aha, my boy, you *daren't* say it!" I am sure I read his thoughts correctly, for as soon as I had finished speaking, he burst out laughing and patted my knee in a patronising way.

"Don't go quite so fast, my young friend," I read in his eyes. "Wait a bit," I thought to myself.

"I feel particularly happy, to-night," cried the prince, "I really don't know why. I feel wonderfully jolly, dear boy. I specially wanted to have a talk about that personage—you know who,—we really must speak out about her—have it out



completely, you know, and decide something. This time I hope to get you to understand me thoroughly. I spoke to you a little while ago about that money question, and about that ridiculous father of hers—the young sexagenarian. But we needn't talk about *that*. Of course, I only said all that rubbish just *so*. You are a literary man, you will have guessed. Ha! ha! ha!"

I looked at him with amazement, I don't think he was drunk yet.

"But as for this girl, I assure you I honour her, I even love her, I really do. She's rather a pepperbox, but there's no rose without a thorn, you know; and, though my Aleósha is a dreadful fool, I forgive him a great deal for his good taste; in a word, I like this girl, and I have (here he smacked his lips ostentatiously) special views for her benefit. But we'll talk of that later."

"Listen to me, prince," I said, "I do not understand this sharp change of tone on your part; but kindly change the subject."

"What, angry again! Very well, very well, I will. I just want to ask you this one question first, my good friend: Do you esteem her very much?"

"Of course," I said, curtly, and with impatience.

"And—well, and *love* her?" he continued, showing his teeth in a revolting manner and blinking his eyes.

"You are forgetting yourself," I cried.

"Well I won't, I won't; be calm. I am in a most extraordinary frame of mind to-day. I feel jollier than I have felt for ages. Let's have some champagne, what think you, my poet?"

"I am not going to drink; I don't want it."

"Don't say so, you are to keep me company to-day. I feel myself kind this evening to sentimentality, and I can't allow myself to be happy alone. Who knows?—perhaps we shall drink ourselves into the most brotherly familiarity. Ha! ha! ha! No; my young friend, you don't know me yet. I feel sure that you will love me. I want you to share both joy and sorrow with me to-night, and tears and laughter, though I trust that I shan't do very much crying myself. Now, just think, Ivan Petrovitch, if I don't have my way perhaps all this inspiration of mine will pass away, and be lost, and you'll get no benefit of it. Why, you are here solely to hear something from me. Isn't it so?" he added, looking at me

with an impertinent leer. "Yes. Very well, then choose your wine."

I consented. "Does he want to make me drunk?" I thought. By the bye, I may as well here mention a rumour which I had long since heard concerning the prince. The rumour was, that, however refined and gentlemanly the man might be, and was, in society, he liked to drink hard at nights and was often disgracefully drunk. They say Aleósha knew this, and did his best to hide it from all, especially from Natásha; he had once almost let it out to me, but had pulled himself up and refused to answer any questions. I had heard the fact from other sources, but never believed it. To-night, however, I waited to see what would happen.

The wine was brought. The prince poured out a couple of glasses, one for me and one for himself.

"She's a dear sweet girl, though she did pitch into me," he continued, tasting his wine with relish. "These charming beings are just at their best at such moments. I believe she thought that she had put me to utter confusion, and pulverised me that evening. You remember how those blushes became her? Are you a connoisseur of women? Sometimes a sudden flush suits a pair of pale cheeks wonderfully; have you noticed it? My goodness, I do believe you are getting angry again!"

"Yes, I *am* angry," I shouted, "I do not wish you to speak of Natásha Nicolaevna at all now; at least not in that tone. I—I—won't allow it."

"Oho! very well, to please you, I'll change the subject. I am as yielding and pliant as pie-crust. We'll talk about *you*. I am fond of you, Ivan Petrovitch. If you only knew what a friendly, sincere affection I felt for you!"

"Hadn't we better talk about business, prince?" I interrupted.

"That is about *our* little affair. I understand you, my good friend. But you've no idea how close we shall get to that question, if we talk about yourself; that is, if you don't interrupt me. So I'll go on. I wanted to say, my invaluable Ivan Petrovitch, that living as you live, is simply going to rack and ruin! May I touch on a delicate matter, in pure friendship? You are poor; you borrow from your publishers in advance; you pay your debts, and live on the rest for half a year, drinking tea in your garret in hopes of a good time

coming, when your novel will come out in your publisher's periodical. Is this so?"

"If it *is* true, such a life is——"

"I know. Better than robbery, or servility, or bribery, or intrigue, etc., etc. I know what you want to say; all that has long ago appeared in print."

"Then there can be no necessity to talk of my affairs! Surely, prince, I need not teach you good manners!"

"Oh no, certainly not! but what's to be done if we alight upon this delicate ground? We can't walk round it. Well, we'll leave the garrets alone for the present; I don't care much about them myself, unless under special circumstances." He laughed hideously. "But this is what surprises me. What fun can you find in playing second fiddle? Of course, I remember that one of your authors has said that 'The very greatest exploit a man can perform, is to confine himself to playing second fiddle in life.' I think that's what he says—something of the sort. I have heard something like this, I know; but Aleósha whipped off your bride from under your nose, and yet you, like some Schiller, defend them, and champion them, and serve them. Forgive me, dear boy, but this is really a poor sort of game. Don't you get tired of it? Aren't you ashamed of the position? I think I should die of mortification in your place; but the principal thing is the shame of it, the *shame!*"

"Prince, I believe you brought me here on purpose to insult me!" I cried, beside myself with indignation.

"Oh, dear, no, oh no, my friend. I am simply at this moment a man of the world, and I want you to be happy; in a word, I want to arrange the whole business. But we'll leave it alone for a bit; you just hear me out, and try not to flare up so, if only for a few minutes. Now, what do you think of marrying yourself? You see, I am speaking now of something altogether outside of the question. Why do you look at me in surprise?"

"I am waiting for you to stop," I said, more than amazed.

"What I want to know, is," he went on, "what you would say if one of your friends, desiring your real and true happiness—nothing ephemeral, but *real*, you know—were to offer you a girl, young and beautiful, but—well, whose affections may have been a little tampered with by someone else—I speak allegorically, but you will understand me—for instance, like

Natasha Nicolaevna ; and suppose you were offered a handsome sum of money for your support (you observe I am talking of something quite *outside* of our affair)—well, what should you say ? ”

“ I tell you you're *mad*, prince ; you're *mad* ! ”

“ Ha ! ha ! ha ! Bah ! Why, I declare, you look as though you wished to hit me ! ”

I certainly did long to be at him. I felt that I could not stand it any longer. He gave me the impression that he was some reptile—some huge and disgusting spider which I longed to destroy. He was enjoying his jesting at my expense. He played with me as a cat does with a mouse, assuming that I was entirely in his power. It seemed to me (and I understood it well enough) that he found a certain satisfaction, a sort of voluptuousness in the vulgarity and impudence and cynicism with which he was at last tearing off his mask before my eyes. He wanted to enjoy my surprise and my horror. He thoroughly despised me and laughed at me. I had felt a presentiment that all this was premeditated, and was leading to something ; but I was in such a position that I was bound to hear him out, whatever he might say. It was to the interest of Natasha, and I must make up my mind to bear anything ; because, perhaps, at this moment the whole question was in process of settlement. And yet, how was I to listen to these cynical, detestable insinuations about her ? How could I sit and listen to his vile words in cold blood ? And to make it worse, he understood very well that I must listen, and could not help myself. I began to answer him shortly and abusively. He understood.

“ Look here, my young friend,” he said, gazing seriously at me, “ we can't go on like this ; so we had better come to an agreement. Now, I want to speak out to you, and you must be so very kind as to hear what I have to say, whatever it may be. I wish to say what I like and choose, and I ought to be permitted to do so. Well, then, my young friend, will you be patient, or will you not ? ”

I set the muscles of my face and kept quiet, though he looked at me with an expression of bitter irony which seemed to challenge a cutting rejoinder. He understood that I agreed to listen, and went on.

“ Don't be angry with me, my young friend. You did not expect any better of me, you know ! You did not expect much of me ; you would have thought just the same of me, however

I had spoken to you, even if I had clothed my words in perfumed and honeyed elegance. You despise me; don't you now? You see how charmingly simple and frank I am with you! I admit everything; even my childish tempers and fads. Yes, my dear boy, give me a little more *bonhomie* from your side, and we shall very soon settle all our business, and we shall at last understand one another thoroughly. But don't be surprised at me; I have got so sick of all this innocence, all this pastoral humbug of Aleósha's, all this Schillerising, all this exaltation of his confounded tie with that Natásha girl (a very nice little woman, all the same), that I may say I am delighted to have this opportunity of, as it were, sticking out my tongue at it all, in freedom. This is the opportunity, and that's why I wanted to pour out my soul to you. Ha! ha! ha!"

"You surprise me, prince; I hardly know you. You have dropped into the tone of a Polichinetti! These unexpected revelations—!"

"Well done; ha, ha! very good, a capital simile. Ha, ha! I am a dissipated rascal, and you must be very condescending to me. But, let's have a drink," he continued, raising his glass. "Do you know, my friend, that one stupid evening at Natásha's finished me off completely. You remember! She was admirable, certainly, but I came away from there very much put out, and I shall not forget it. Of course, our turn will come; it is coming on fast now, but at present we'll leave it. Among other things, I wished to explain one trait in my character, which has probably escaped you. It is hatred of all that stupid, naïve innocence and pastoral trash; and one of my delightful and piquant amusements is, to put on that sort of humbugging tone myself, to butter-up and make much of some such clever young Schiller fellow, and then suddenly to raise my mask before his very eyes, and make a grimace at him with a very solemn face, and show him my tongue—all this at the very moment when he is the least in the world prepared for such a surprise. What! don't you understand that sort of thing? Perhaps you think it low and ignoble and that ——"

"Of course I do."

"You are frank. Ah, well! so am I myself, stupidly enough; but it's my nature. I think I should like to tell you a few details of my character and life; you will understand me better, and it will be curiously interesting to you."

"Prince," I said, "it is late, and I——"

"Oh, don't hurry! Where to? No, no; sit down, and let's talk cosily and friendly over our wine. You think I am drunk. Never mind; so much the better. Ha, ha, ha! These friendly meetings are so memorable afterwards, they give one so much of the delight of retrospection. Ivan Petrovitch, you are not a kind-hearted man; you have no sentimentality or feeling. What is an hour or two for the sake of such a friend as I am? Besides, you are an author; you ought to bless such a chance as this. Why, you can make me one of your characters. Ha! ha! ha! Good heavens! how charmingly candid I am to-day."

He was evidently getting drunk. His face was changed, and wore a most mischievous expression. He clearly meant biting and kicking. "Perhaps it's better that he is drunk," I thought, "because drunken men always blab out their secrets." But he had his wits about him.

"My friend," he began, "I told you just now, as a confession of weakness, of my great desire on certain occasions, to put out my tongue at people. For this simple and touching piece of candour you likened me to Polichinetti, which amused me much. But if you reproach me, or are surprised at me, for being rude to you, or, perhaps, even indecent in my communications to you, like a moujik in fact—or, in a word, for changing my tone, then you are quite wrong. In the first place, I like it; secondly, I am not at home, but on the spree with you, like two good chums, as we are; and then, I love caprice. Do you know, I have sometimes turned philanthropist through caprice, and have gone in for much the same sort of ideas as you indulge in. That was long ago though, in my youth. I remember at that time I came down to my country place full of humanitarian ideas and objects, and you've no notion how miserably dull it was—so much so, that, fancy what happened! I had to make acquaintance with the young women—the good-looking ones—to relieve my dulness. You are not making faces, surely? Oh, my dear young friend, don't! Why, we are having a friendly chat; we are out on the spree together! This is the very time for unbosoming oneself! Mine is a simple, pure, Russian nature; it loves to be frank. Besides, *carpe diem*, my boy, let us enjoy life while we can. We shall have to throw up the sponge some day, and then——

"Well, to resume, I remember one girl, a shepherdess, had

a fine young moujik for a husband, whom I punished rather severely. He died in the hospital. I had a beautiful little hospital built, you know—twelve beds, and all delightfully clean and tidy. I've pulled it down long ago; but at that time I had gone in for philanthropy. Well, I very nearly whipped that moujik to death for having such a pretty wife. Why, there you are, making a face again! Do you find this sort of thing repulsive? Does it wound your generous feelings? Oh, calm yourself, do! It's all past now; these were juvenile pranks. I did all this while I was romantic and longing to be a benefactor to humanity, and to found philanthropic institutions. I had got into that groove, I used to whip them like mad then. I don't now. One goes in for making faces now—everybody does it, it's the fashion. But what amuses me more than anything is that old fool Ikménief. He must have known all about that moujik business. Out of the goodness of his heart (which is made of treacle, I think), and because he thought so highly of me, he determined to believe nothing about it. He stuck up for me through thick and thin for twelve years; in fact, until the shoe pinched his *own* foot. Ha! ha! ha! But this is all humbug. Let's drink, my young friend. Listen, now. Do you like women?"

I made no answer. He had begun another bottle of wine now.

"I love talking about women at supper," he went on. I should like to introduce you to a certain Mademoiselle Philibert after supper; shall I? But what's the matter? You won't even look at me. H'm!"

He became thoughtful; but suddenly raised his head and looked intently at me.

"Look here, my young poet," he continued, "I dare say you are calling me a blackguard and scoundrel, and corrupt and vicious, and all the rest of it. But for all that I am only guiltier than other people in the fact that I confess and admit that which other people do their best to hide even from themselves; it may be wrong of me to do this, but I wish to do it. Besides," he added with a jesting laugh, "don't trouble yourself about me. I said *guilty*, but I don't in the least apologise for myself. Observe, too, I am most polite and generous. I do not try to put you to confusion by asking you whether *you* do not also possess the same kind of secrets hidden away as I have just revealed, so as to justify myself by your

admission of equal guilt. However, I always was a generous fellow."

"You are simply talking nonsense," I said, looking contemptuously at him.

"Nonsense; well done! You are wondering why I brought you here to unbosom myself to you without any apparent reason. Am I right?"

"Well, yes."

"Ah, you shall have a reason for it afterwards!"

"The simplest explanation is that you have drunk two bottles of wine and they have gone to your head."

"That means that I am drunk, only you use a nicer expression. Oh, beautiful delicacy! But wait a bit, we are beginning to quarrel again, and we were just getting on to such a very charming subject. Ah, yes, my poet! if there be anything altogether delightful in this world it is—woman."

"Excuse me, prince, but I still do not understand why you selected *me*, in particular, as the receptacle for your confidence and love-yearnings."

"H'm, well! I told you you should know all later on. But even so, letting other reasons alone, you are a poet, you understand me, and that's reason enough for me. There's a voluptuous pleasure in throwing off the mask like this before somebody. I'll tell you an anecdote about a madman in Paris; they put him into a lunatic asylum afterwards, but one day, when he first went mad, it occurred to him to amuse himself like this: He undressed at home, all but his boots, threw a long cloak over himself, wrapped it well round, and went out with great dignity into the streets. Well, to look at him, you would suppose he was just like any ordinary man out for a walk in a big cloak; but whenever he saw anybody coming along alone, without anyone else near, and in a quiet place, he would march up with a solemn air, apparently in deep thought, and, stopping suddenly before the astonished pedestrian, would throw open his cloak and reveal himself in all the dignity of nature's own garb. This would last a minute or so, and then, silently, he would wrap himself round once more, and, without moving a muscle of his face, pass by the amazed spectator, solemnly and slowly, like the ghost in Hamlet. He did this with every person he met—man, woman, or child, and found the greatest satisfaction in the proceeding. Well, some sort of pleasure of this kind is to be found in



getting hold of a Schillery sort of a person and, having shocked him suddenly, in sticking out your tongue at him when he least expects it."

"Yes; but your friend was a madman, and you—"

"Well, what? I am in my senses, am I?"

"Yes."

The prince laughed. "You are right, my dear boy," he said, with the most insolent expression of face that can be imagined.

"Prince," I said, irritated with his impudence, "you hate us—me and all of mine, and you are revenging yourself upon me now, for all. This is the fruit of your petty self-love; you are wicked; but even your wickedness is petty. We have annoyed you; probably that last evening especially angered you. Of course, you could not otherwise pay me out half so well as by thus showing your utter contempt for me; you exempt yourself from even the most ordinary civilities, which men usually consider necessary among themselves. You clearly let me see that you are not ashamed of pulling off your miserable mask before me, and of displaying your wretched cynicism. I am not worthy of causing you shame."

"Why do you tell me all this?" he asked rudely, and looking mischievously at me. "To show how sharp you are?"

"To show you that I understand you, and to make that fact quite clear to you."

"What an idea, my good boy," he said, suddenly relapsing into his former boisterous tone. "You are only diverting me from my subject. Let's drink, my friend; let me fill your glass. I was just going to tell you of a most charming and curious adventure. I'll tell you the main points in general terms. Well, once I knew a certain lady, she was not in the first bloom of youth, but about twenty-seven or eight—such a beauty, such a bust, such a gait, such style! Her eyes were like an eagle's, keen and severe. She carried herself and behaved in a most dignified manner. She was cold as ice, and enveloped everyone around her with the spell of her cruel virtue. I say cruel, because there never was so severe a judge as she was. She condemned not only corruption and vice, but the slightest tendency to weakness among other women, and condemned unconditionally and without appeal. She was a great force in her own circle. She looked down on everyone about her with passionless austerity, like an abbess of the middle ages.

Young girls were awfully afraid of her eyes, for one look from her, one hint, was enough to ruin their reputations. Even the men were afraid of her.

"Well, at length my lady settled down into a sort of contemplative mysticism, quiet and dignified, and what happened? Well, I had the honour to be the receiver of her confidence, and I tell you there was never corruption more corrupt than this woman; in a word, I was her secret lover myself. Our relations were so arranged, and all was done in such a masterly fashion, that not one of all her household ever had the slightest suspicion, excepting a little French maid who was her mistress's confidante. I tell you, this woman was corrupt to such an extent that—and yet the cream of the whole thing, in her eyes, was the *mystery* and the impudence of the imposition. The laugh she had over all those whom she preached to in society, and the trampling on all that should not be trampled upon! That's what she liked! Well, she jilted me after a year, and I could not have injured her if I had tried ever so hard. Who would have believed a word against such a saint? Well, my young friend, what say you?"

I had listened to his story with loathing. "It's disgusting bestiality; that's what I think," I said.

"Ah! you would not have been my dear young friend, if you had not answered so. I knew you would say that. Wait a bit, my dear boy; you'll live and learn. Just now you must go on with your pap and buns. No, no; you're not a poet after that! Why, this woman understood life, and got the honey out of it."

"But why descend to such bestiality?"

"What bestiality?"

"That to which you and this woman fell!"

"Oh! you call it bestiality; but that only shows that you are still in leading-strings. But come, we'll change the subject; all this is twaddle, isn't it? The only thing that isn't humbug in this world is oneself. The whole world is for me, and was made for me; that's my creed. Listen, my young friend, one can live very fairly well in this world. This is the best faith to hold, because, without it, one can't live even badly. One would have to poison oneself. Some fool did that, they say. He moralised to such an extent that he destroyed everything—everything; and at length arrived at the conclusion that he had nothing left to work on. He had reduced everything to

*nil*; so he decided that prussic acid was the only good thing in life. You will say that was like a Hamlet—some grand despair, or something else grand—but you're a poet, and I'm a simple-minded man who must look on things practically. For instance, I have long since freed myself from all notions of responsibility, and, in fact, from all beaten tracks. I only consider myself bound when I see some gain to myself in it. You talk about ideals and virtue, and I will admit anything you like; but what am I to do when I know for certain that at the basis of all human virtues there lies the most profound egotism? And the more virtuous any action, the more egotistical it is. Love yourself; that's the only rule I recognise. Don't give money away for nothing; pay for your pleasures if you like, and you have done your duty to your neighbours. That's my morality, if you must have it; but I tell you frankly that I much prefer *not* paying, but getting my neighbour to do things for nothing. I don't go in for ideals, I never felt the need of them. One can live in the world so pleasantly and happily without ideals; in a word, I'm delighted to be able to dispense with prussic acid. Now, if I were more *virtuous* I should probably require its aid, like that fool of a philosopher (undoubtedly a German). No! I like life as it is—I like weight, and rank, and an establishment. I like—I *love* a good stake at cards; but, above all—women! Women of every kind; I even love vice—mysterious, delightful, original. I don't mind a little dirt, even, for a change. Ha! ha! ha! I am looking at your face; how contemptuously you are observing me now."

"You are right," I replied.

"But assuming that you are right; now, isn't a little dirt better than a dose of prussic acid?"

"No; prussic acid is decidedly preferable."

"Ah! I asked you that on purpose to have the rare delight of hearing your reply. I knew what you would say. No, no, my friend; if you are a real philanthropist then wish for all wise men to have my views of life, even with a little admixture of dirt, otherwise, very shortly there will be nothing for the wise men to do in the world, and only the fools will be left. I know all your new ideas, but they don't hurt me. They don't make me ashamed of myself. I admit everything, so long as I am all right myself. My name is Legion; there are hosts of us, and we all get on capitally. Everyone living may come to grief, but we never shall; we shall go on as long as

the world does. I want to live till I'm ninety at least. I don't like death; I'm afraid of it. Why, deuce knows *how* we shall have to die; don't let's talk about it. The devil take all philosophy! Let's drink! Let's see, we had just begun to talk about pretty girls. Hollo! where are you off to?"

"I'm going home, and it's quite time you went too."

"Oh, nonsense, nonsense. Here have I been opening my very heart to you, and you don't appreciate this proof of the depth of my friendship. There's no sympathy in you, my poor poet. But stop a bit, I must have another bottle."

"What, a third?"

"Yes; a third. Now, as to virtue, my son—you'll allow me to call you by that sweet name? Well, my son, as to virtue, I have already said that the more virtuous virtue is, the more egotism there must be about it. I want to tell you a sweet little anecdote on this subject. I loved a girl once, and I think I really did love this girl sincerely; I may say she had sacrificed a good deal on my account,—"

"Is that the one you robbed?" I asked, rudely, for I did not care to restrain myself any longer.

The prince shuddered and his face changed; he turned his inflamed eyes full on me, and they were ablaze with perplexity and rage.

"Wait a minute," he said, as though to himself, "wait a minute, let me think! I certainly am drunk, and it is difficult for me to collect my thoughts." He was silent, and looked slyly and maliciously, but curiously, at me, holding my hand with his, as though he were afraid that I should go away. I am certain that at this moment he was breaking his head to divine where I could have found out this, as he supposed, unknown and unknowable fact, and whether there might be some danger in my knowledge of it. This went on for a minute or so, and then his face suddenly changed. The same old boisterous, tipsy expression came into his eyes again. He burst out laughing.

"Ha! ha! ha!" he cried. "A real Talleyrand! Yes, I certainly did stand before her, and have it thrown in my teeth that I had robbed her. Oh, the woman did rage, how she did scold! She was dreadfully angry with me, and all for nothing, too. I never robbed her, as you so neatly expressed it just now; she made me a present of her money, certainly, but having done so, the money was mine. Why, supposing

you were to give me your best dress coat (he glanced at my shabby old one,—I had had it for three years), and I thanked you and wore it for a year and then that you were suddenly to claim it and quarrel with me for its possession, when I had worn it out. That would not be generous. Why give it to me at all? Then again, in spite of the money being my own property, I would have given it back to her with the greatest pleasure, but where was I to raise such a sum as that? But above all, I can't stand pastorals and Schillerising, and all that, as I told you before, and that was the cause of our quarrel. You've no idea how she looked, standing there and yelling that she surrendered the money (*my* money, be it remarked). Well, malice entered into my heart, and I was suddenly enabled to judge clearly in the matter, and I thought, 'Now then, if I give her back this money I shall make her downright unhappy. I should be depriving her of the satisfaction of being miserable *because of me* and of being able to curse me all her life.' I assure you, my dear young friend, there *does* exist, in misfortune, this very real and very exalted condition of mind, which finds the greatest relief and consolation in being able to believe in one's own absolute innocence and high-mindedness and to have the right to call one's opponent a scoundrel. This kind of intoxication is to be met with frequently in these Schillerizing natures, and though very likely she may afterwards have been in want of something to eat, yet, I am quite convinced she was perfectly happy. I did not wish to deprive her of her happiness, and so I kept the money. All this justifies my remark that the greater and louder the profession of high-mindedness and virtue may be the more repulsive is the egotism hidden at its root. Isn't this clear to you yet? Ah! you wanted to catch me tripping; didn't you, now? Oh you Talleyrand, you!"

"Good-bye," I said, getting up.

"One minute; just a couple of words in conclusion," he cried, suddenly changing his voice from the disagreeable tone of the minute before to great seriousness. "Hear me out. From all I have said, I think you must perceive pretty clearly that I never have and never will let anyone stand in the way of my own private and personal gain. I love money, and money I must have. Kátia has got plenty, her father held a spirit-monopoly for ten years. She has three million roubles, and these three millions will be of the greatest use to me. Aleósha

and Kátia are a capital pair; both are fools to the very limits of fooldom, and that's what I want. Therefore, I desire that this marriage be consummated as quickly as possible. In two or three weeks, the countess and Kátia go to the interior, Aleósha escorting them. Just tell Natásha beforehand that there had better be no pastorals or Schillerising about the matter; I had better not be balked, for I am revengeful and mischievously inclined. I am not at all afraid of her; everything will go as I wish it to go, there's no doubt of that; and therefore if I warn her beforehand it can only be for her own sake. Just see that there's no nonsense and that the girl behaves herself reasonably, otherwise it may be nasty, very nasty, for her. She ought to be very grateful to me that I did not deal with her as I might legitimately have done.

"You must know, my poet, that Russian law protects domestic peace; it guarantees to the father his son's obedience, and those who seduce the son from his sacred duties to his parents are not encouraged by law. Just think now; I have powerful connections, while she has none. As if I could not do what I liked with her! But I have done her no harm, because up to now she has been good and reasonable. Oh, don't be afraid! I can assure you sharp eyes have been watching her this last half-year; we know all about her—every detail. That is why I am waiting quietly for Aleósha to get tired of her and break with her; he has begun already, and meanwhile it has been a nice little distraction for him. I am still the kind humane father in his eyes, and so I must remain. Ha! ha! Dear me, I remember I went so far that evening as to compliment her on her disinterestedness in not having married Aleósha. I should like to see how she could have married him. As to my visit to the girl that day, all that was simply because I felt that the time had come to put an end to the engagement; and I wanted to see how matters stood with my own eyes. Well, is that enough? or perhaps you would like to know a little more—why I brought you here? Why I have shown myself up like this and made a clean breast of it, when the whole thing could have been equally well done without these revelations, eh?"

"Yes." I braced myself and listened greedily; there was nothing more for me to say.

"Simply because, my friend, I have observed in yourself rather more reasonableness and a clearer view of things in

general than exists among those fools of ours. It is a great thing, my friend, to know whom one is dealing with, and I have shown you this. So now you know it ; and as you love *her* I trust you will now use your influence, for you certainly *have* influence over her, to save her from *certain* worries ; otherwise *she will have* worries, and I solemnly assure you that the worries will not be of a kind to be trifled with. Well, the third reason for my candour is this (you've guessed it, my dear friend, I'm sure), that I felt it would do me good to spit at the whole business a little, and especially to spit in *your* face."

"And you have attained your end," I said, shaking with rage. "I admit that you could not have expressed your devilry generally, and your contempt for me and all of us, better than by these revelations. You were not only not afraid that your disgusting confessions would compromise you before me, but you were not even *ashamed* to tell me all this about yourself, to such a depth of baseness have you descended. You do not seem to consider me a man."

"You have guessed it, my young friend," he said, rising ; "you have guessed everything. That comes of being a literary man ? I hope we part friends. Shall we drink a loving cup ?"

"You are drunk, and that is the only reason why I do not now treat you as you deserve."

"The spirit of silence is over us again. You don't say *how* you ought to treat me. Ha ! ha ! ha ! May I pay for your supper ?"

"Don't trouble yourself ; I am going to pay for myself."

"Oh, very well ! Do we go the same way ?"

"I won't go yours !"

"Good-bye, my poet. I hope you have understood me ?" He went out, walking rather unsteadily, and did not turn to look at me. His footman put him into the carriage ; I went homewards. It was nearly three o'clock in the morning ; rain was falling, and the night was very dark.

## PART IV.

### CHAPTER I.

I WILL not describe my exasperation. Though I might have expected every word of this, still I was astonished, just as though he had sprung all his villainy on me quite unexpectedly. My feelings were confused, I remember, just as though I had been wounded, and a black anxiety was gnawing at my heart—I was dreadfully anxious about Natásha. I had a presentiment of much trouble ahead for her, and I wondered vaguely how it might be avoided, and how to soften down the bitterness of these last moments before the final break up of the whole business. As to the inevitableness of such a break up there could now be no question, and it was equally certain that the end was approaching. I did not notice how I ever got home, though the rain poured down on me all the way; it was three in the morning. I had not time to knock at the door when I heard groaning, and the door hastily opened, just as though Nelly had not been to bed, but had watched for my arrival at the very threshold. A candle was burning; I looked at Nelly's face, and was much shocked at the sight. It was totally changed; her eyes burned, as though with fever, and had a kind of wild appearance, just as if she did not recognise me. She was in a high fever.

“Nelly, what's the matter? Are you ill?” I asked, putting my arm round her. She nestled to me trembling, and said something very quickly and jerkily, just as though she had waited for me at the door so as to tell me the news as quickly as possible. But her words were disconnected and strange—I understood nothing; she was wandering.

I led her to her bed as fast as I could; but she kept clinging to me as though afraid of somebody or something;



and even when she was lying down she seized my hand and pressed it tight, so that I should not leave her again. My nerves were in such a perplexed and agitated state already, that I could not look at her without crying. I was quite ill myself. Seeing me weeping, she stared at me long and fixedly, as though trying to collect her thoughts and concentrate them on something. It was evident that it took all her strength to do this; and at last something in the shape of a thought seemed to force its way through the mist. She generally found it very difficult to collect herself after a bad fit, and to talk intelligibly, and this was the case now. After making the most strenuous exertions to make me understand something, and seeing that I could not follow her, she stretched out her little hand and began to wipe my tears away; then she put her arm round my neck, pulled my face down to her and kissed me.

It was clear that she had had a fit, and that it had overtaken her just when she was near the door; and that on awaking from the attack she had been unable to come to herself. During the moments of recovery, I believe it frequently happens that the patient suffering from epilepsy is subject to delirium and strange dreadful fancies; and probably at the corresponding moment of Nelly's attack came, mingled with her delirious fancies, the confused consciousness that I would be coming home shortly and wanting the door opened; and therefore, lying at the very threshold of the door, she had waited for me there, and struggled to her feet at the first sound of my footsteps.

"But why did she happen to be at the door?" I thought. And suddenly I observed with surprise that she had her fur cloak on (one which I had just bought for her from an old woman who occasionally brought wares to the door, and from whom I now and then took things on credit); she must, therefore, have been just about to go out, and had probably opened the door when the epileptic fit seized her. Where could she have been going to? Was she not under the influence of delirium even when she prepared to leave the house?

Meanwhile the fever did not abate and she was very soon wandering once more. She had had two fits in my rooms before this, but both had ended happily; this time, however, she seemed to be in a dreadfully high fever. I watched over

her for half an hour, and then, drawing a couple of chairs up to her bedside, I lay down on them, dressed as I was, so as to awake at once if she called me.

I did not put out the candles ; and I looked at her several times again before I fell asleep ; she was pale, her lips were dry and had blood on them, probably the result of the fit ; the expression of pain had not left her face, and a sort of harassing anxiety seemed to be upon her even while she slept. I determined to go for the doctor as early as possible next morning, if she became worse. I was afraid she might be having some serious fever.

"The prince frightened her," I thought ; and I trembled as I called to mind that wretched man's story of the woman who had thrown her money in his face.

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## CHAPTER II.

A FORTNIGHT went by and Nelly was quite recovered. Although no serious fever developed itself, she had nevertheless been very ill. She left her bed for the first time on a fine bright day at the end of April—it was Holy Week.

Poor little creature ! I cannot continue my narrative in strict consecutiveness just now. A long time has elapsed since then, but even now, when I write down these recollections, I cannot think of that poor pale little face and those piercing long looks from out of the dark eyes, without a feeling of sharp pain and heaviness of heart. She used to gaze at me, when we were alone, gaze and gaze as though making me guess what she was thinking of ; and then, seeing that I had not guessed, she used to smile to herself, quietly and suddenly stretch out her thin little white hand, with its hot feverish fingers, caressingly towards me. It's all past history now, and everything is known that is to be known but to this day I have never quite fathomed the mystery of this dear little wounded, bewildered, offended heart.

I feel that I am digressing, but at this moment I cannot think of anything but Nelly. It is strange, but now as I lie

here on the hospital bed, deserted by all whom I have loved so long and dearly, occasionally some memory of that time comes over me, and things which I have never understood until now become illuminated, between my fleeting attacks of unconsciousness, with new meaning; and I see and understand clearly, and in a moment, what up to this day has been involved in absolute mystery.

The first four days of Nelly's illness the doctor and I were very nervous about her; but on the fifth day the doctor drew me aside, and told me that there was nothing to fear, she would certainly recover. This was the same old bachelor doctor whom I had long known, a kind and jovial old fellow whom I had called in for Nelly's first attack, and whose large St. Stanislas order had so much struck Nelly's fancy.

"Then there's nothing at all to be afraid of?" I asked with delight.

"Well, she'll be all right *now*, but she will die very soon."

"How! die?" I cried, stunned with this most unexpected news.

"Yes, certainly; she cannot live long. There is organic heart disease, and under ordinary circumstances she must inevitably have another attack. I dare say she will recover again; but then a further attack will follow, and in the end she must succumb."

"Oh, surely it cannot be so! Cannot anything be done to save her?"

"I fear it must be. But it is quite possible that under circumstances of greater happiness, if her life be quiet and peaceful and more full of joy, the child's death may be averted for some time; in fact, there have been cases—unexpected, abnormal, strange instances—where a patient has been saved, through some amalgamation of most favourable circumstances; but radically *cured*, never."

"Good God!" I cried, "what can I do?"

"Well, she must obey my orders, live a quiet, uneventful life, and take her powders regularly. I have observed that this little girl is the victim of *caprices*; she hates to take her powders regularly; just now she absolutely refused to take her dose."

"Yes, doctor," I said; "she certainly is a strange child, but I ascribe it all to her illness; yesterday she was most docile, and to-day, when I brought her the medicine, she

jerked the spoon, as though accidentally, and spilled it all. When I tried to mix another powder, she seized the box, and threw it down on the ground, and burst into tears. I don't think the reason was that she had to take her powder, though," I added, thoughtfully.

"H'm, irritation! Her former great miseries" (I had told the doctor a great part of Nelly's history, and my story had struck him very forcibly) "are the source of all the trouble. Meanwhile, the principal thing is, to take the powders; she *must* do it. I'll just try once more whether I can't make her listen to my medical counsels, or in other words, take a powder."

We both came out of the kitchen, where our conversation was held, and the doctor went up to her bedside once more. But Nelly had heard us, I think; at all events, she had turned her face towards us, and was lying as though listening intently. I saw this from the kitchen. However, when we came up to her, the little wretch had bobbed down again, and was looking at us with a mischievous smile. The poor little thing had grown dreadfully pale during her four days of illness; her eyes were sunken; the fever had not as yet left her. All the stranger for this did her mischievous looks now seem, and the kind-hearted old German doctor was much surprised to see her.

He seriously, but softening his voice as much as he could, caressingly and kindly insisted on the absolute necessity for taking the powders. Nelly raised her head to take the dose, but suddenly, and apparently by the purest accident, she upset the spoon, and her medicine was all spilt on the floor. I felt sure she had done it on purpose.

"Oh, what dreadful carelessness," said the old man, quite quietly; "and I'm afraid you did it on purpose, which was not nice of you; however, it is easily mended, and I can get you another powder ready."

Nelly laughed in his face. The doctor wagged his head methodically."

"Oh, that's not at *all* nice," he said; "not by any means praiseworthy."

"Don't be angry with me," said Nelly, trying vainly not to laugh again. "I really will take it; but—do you love me?—"

"If you are good I will love you very much."

"Very much?"

"Yes, very much."

"And now you don't love me?"

"Oh, yes, I love you now, too."

"And will you kiss me if I wish it?"

"Yes, if you deserve it." Here Nelly could not restrain herself, and burst out laughing again.

"Our patient has a merry nature, but just now she is the victim of nervous caprice," the doctor observed, with the most serious air possible.

"Very well, I'll take the powder," Nelly cried suddenly, with her little weak voice. But when I grow up and am big, will you take me for your wife?"

This last joke evidently pleased her greatly, for her eyes shone and her lips trembled with laughter as she awaited the amazed doctor's reply.

"Oh yes! of course!" he said, amused, but rather bewildered. "Certainly, if you are a good and obedient girl, and if——"

"If I take my powders?" Nelly put in.

"Oho! yes!" cried the doctor. "Take your powders. She's a good girl," he whispered to me. "There's a great deal of good in her, oh, a very great deal. But to be my wife! What a strange fancy!"

He brought her the medicine again. This time she did not even make a pretence about the thing, but simply jerked his hand up, spoon and all, and the whole of the medicine was spilled all over the poor old man's face and shirt-front. Nelly laughed loud, but not with the same joyousness and simplicity as before. Her face was sly and mischievous; and all this time she seemed to be avoiding my eyes and looking only at the doctor, whom she watched with smiling face, through the transparent veil of which I could plainly see that she was a good deal disturbed. I waited to see what the funny old man would do next.

"Oh dear me! spilt again! what a misfortune! However, we can easily mix another," said the poor old fellow, mopping his face and shirt-front.

This struck Nelly very much. She expected me to be angry and scold her, or at all events to give her—what was all she wanted just now—some excuse for bursting into

tears and groaning hysterically, or for upsetting more medicine, or even smashing something, to give vent to her poor little capricious aching heart's passions. Not only Nelly, but many other people are subject to such fits of caprice, which are, moreover, not peculiar to the sick. How often have I myself walked up and down my room with an indefinite longing to be offended by somebody or other, or to have something said by someone which I could take up and found a quarrel upon in order to vent my evil humours. Women, when they are attacked in this way, generally relieve themselves with tears, and the more sensitive ones may even develop hysterics. It is a very simple matter, and one which is familiar to all—especially when there exists in the heart of any person some grievance which he longs to confide in someone else and cannot do so.

However, Nelly, struck by the angelic kindness and patience of the old doctor whom she had so teased, and who had now prepared a third dose for her, without a word of reproach, had suddenly become very quiet. The jesting smile left her lips, she blushed, and her eyes filled with tears; she looked at me for a second, and then turned quickly away again. The doctor brought her the dose; she drank it off quickly and timidly, and seized the old man's fat red hand, looking up into his eyes.

"You are angry—that I am so naughty," she tried to say, but did not finish her sentence; and snuggling away under her blanket, head and all, she gave way to a fit of hysterical sobbing.

"Oh! don't cry, my dear little woman. This is only a nervous attack. Here, drink a little water." But Nelly did not hear.

"Don't cry, little one!" he went on. "Don't upset yourself like this!" He very nearly cried over her himself, for he was an extremely sensitive man. "I'll forgive you and take you for my little wife, if you'll be a good little girl and——"

"Take my powders!" The words came up from under the bedclothes with a little weak bell-like laugh, nervous, and interrupted with a sob, a laugh that I knew so well by this time.

"Oh, she's a dear, ingenuous little girl!" the doctor said solemnly, and with tears in his eyes. "Poor little thing!" he added.

And from this time there arose the strangest and most extraordinary sympathy between these two. It was just the

opposite with me. Nelly seemed to grow more and more morose and nervous and irritable towards me. I did not know what to attribute this circumstance to, especially since the change had come on so very suddenly. During the first days of her illness she had been unspeakably tender and caressing towards me ; she had seemed unable to look at me enough, and would not allow me out of her sight. She used to take my hand in her little hot palms and seat me beside her ; and if she noticed that I was put out or irritable about anything, she would try to cheer me up, she played with me and laughed and talked to me—evidently putting her own suffering aside for my sake. She hated to see me working at night, or sitting up to watch at her bedside, and cried when I insisted on doing so.

Now and then I remarked that she was much preoccupied ; she would begin to ask me questions about why I grieved, and what was on my mind ; but strangely enough, no sooner did I touch on *Natasha* than she changed the subject, or stopped talking altogether. She seemed to avoid talking about *Natasha*, and this struck me very much. She was always so happy when I came home ; and whenever I took up my hat to go out, she would look at me sadly and reproachfully, and follow me about with her eyes.

On the fourth day of her illness, I was at *Natasha's* the whole evening, and even till past twelve o'clock ; we had a good deal to talk over that day. When I left my house, I had told Nelly that I should be back very soon, as I thought I should. Staying longer than I expected at *Natasha's*, I felt quite comfortable about Nelly, whom I had not left alone. *Alexandra Semeónovna* was sitting with her. She had heard from *Maslobóeff* that Nelly was ill—he had called in for a minute. My goodness ! how that kind little woman, *Alexandra Semeónovna* fussed about it. "So I suppose he won't come to dinner after all !" she had said. "And he's all alone, poor fellow, all alone ; well, we'll show him what our sympathy is. Now, here's a chance—we mustn't let it slip !"

And she turned up at my rooms at once, bringing a whole cargo of things with her in a droszky. After informing me that she had come, and did not intend to go away again, but was going to stay and help me, she began to undo her bundle. Out of it came syrups, jams, chicken, in case the sick child got well enough to eat them ; cooking apples, oranges, *Kiefsky*

(dried fruits) if the doctor allowed, and a lot of linen—sheets, table-napkins, ladies' underlinen, and all sorts of things, a whole hospital stock-in-trade.

"We've got *everything!*" she said to me hurriedly, "and you are a bachelor; you haven't many of these sort of things about, so you must let me arrange it all. Philip Philipovitch told me to come. Now, then, what shall we do first? Quick, quick! What's the first thing? Is she conscious? Oh! *how* uncomfortably she's lying, I must arrange that pillow, her head must be put lower; don't you think a leather pillow would be better? it's so nice and cool. Oh! what an idiot I am, I never brought it; I'll be off and fetch it! Shall I light the fire? I'll send you over my old maid, or I know an old woman who will do; you have no woman-servant about the place. Well, what's to be done first? What's this grassy stuff? Did the doctor prescribe it? for bronchial tea, I suppose? I'll light the fire."

However, I calmed her transports; she was much surprised and rather sorry that there turned out so little to be done. She at once made great friends with Nelly, and was a great help to me during the illness, coming in nearly every day; she always entered in a terrific hurry and with most important mien, as though something had suddenly happened and must be set right at once, and she invariably quoted Philip Philipovitch as the authority for all her actions. She liked Nelly exceedingly, they loved each other like two sisters, and I'm sure Alexandra Semeónovna was in some respects just as much a child as Nelly. She told Nelly stories and so amused her that Nelly was often very dull when Alexandra went away home. Her first appearance had much surprised my little invalid; but she soon guessed why she had come, and, as usual, became silent and unpleasantly morose for a little while.

"Why did she come here?" Nelly had asked, apparently with great discontent, when Alexandra left the house.

"To help you, Nelly, and look after you."

"Why? Why should she? I never did anything for her."

"Kind people don't wait to have good done to them before they do good to others, Nelly. They love to help those who need help, without that. Why, Nelly, there are lots of kind people in the world! It's only your misfortune, little one, that you have not come across them when you particularly required them."



Nelly was silent, and I left her, but a quarter of an hour after she called me to her with her weak little voice, asking for something to drink, and suddenly embraced me tightly, drew me down to her breast, and would not leave go of me for a long, long while.

Next day, when Alexandra Semeónovna came in, Nelly received her with a pleased smile, but still rather as though she were ashamed of accepting her kindness.

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### CHAPTER III.

WELL, that was the day that I was at Natásha's all the evening. I got home very late, Nelly was asleep, and Alexandra was sleepy, too, but she sat up and waited for me. She hastily began to tell me how Nelly had been quite jolly at first, and had laughed a good deal, but when I didn't come home she got more and more silent and thoughtful. Then she began to complain of headache, then began crying, and then sobbed and sobbed "so that I really didn't know *what* to do with her," Alexandra added.

"We began to talk about Natásha Nicolaevna, but I could tell her nothing about your friend, and so she stopped asking me after a time, and did nothing but cry until she fell asleep. Well, good night, Ivan Petrovitch, she's certainly better to-day, I think. I must be going; Philip Philipovitch said I must be home in respectable time—in fact, I may tell you, he only gave me two hours to-night, and I have stayed the rest of the time on my own responsibility. Oh, goodness! Ivan Petrovitch, I forgot, he's sure to be tipsy, and how am I to get in? He has something important going on in business just now; I can't think what it is, and he is so preoccupied, and yet he *will* drink, oh dear me! Goodness! Ivan Petrovitch, what a lot of books you have got, and all wise ones I suppose, and what a fool I am, I have never read anything. Well, good night! *au revoir* till to-morrow!"

Next day Nelly woke up sad and cross, and did not want to speak to me at all. She seemed to be angry with me. How-

ever, I caught several of her side-glances at me, unobserved, and remarked that they seemed to be full of a sort of tragic pain, and yet had a great tenderness in them, nothing of which appeared in the looks she vouchsafed to give me straight to my face. This was the day of the scene with the doctor during the administering of her powders. I did not know what to think.

Nelly's conduct towards me had changed completely. Her strangeness and caprice, and what at times appeared to amount to almost hatred for me continued until the day when she left my house—until the catastrophe, in fact, which brought an end to the whole of our romance; but of this later.

Occasionally, however, for an hour or so she would relapse into her old tenderness towards me: Her caresses seemed redoubled in earnestness during these intervals, and were nearly always accompanied by bitter tears; but the tender moments passed very quickly, and she would fall back into her gloomy mood, looking crossly at me, or would be as capricious and passionate as she had been that day before the doctor; but observing that some new piece of mischief fell flat on me, or seemed distasteful to me, she would first laugh loud and then burst into tears. She quarrelled with Alexandra Semeónovna once, and told her she did not require her help. When I began to reproach her for her ingratitude she fired up, answered me hotly, and then relapsed into silence, refusing to speak to me for two whole days, refusing to take any medicines, refusing even to eat and drink, and only the old doctor could persuade her ultimately to be a little reasonable. I have said, before, that a strange sympathy sprang up between Nelly and the old doctor ever since the day of the powders; Nelly was very fond of him and always received him with a pleased smile, however morose she might have been up to the moment of his coming. As for the old man he took to coming every day, even twice a day, long after Nelly was quite well again; he seemed to be unable to pass a day without listening to her laugh, and observing her pretty way of chatting with him. He took to bringing her books, all of an instructive kind; he brought her bonbons in pretty boxes, coming in with such a solemn air on these occasions that Nelly always knew he had a present for her. He used to sit down gravely beside Nelly, and begin a lecture about "if a certain little girl were good she should have something nice," which made Nelly laugh at the simple-minded old

fellow ; but always with a most affectionate look in her bright eyes. The scene would invariably end by the old man rising solemnly from his seat, pulling out the box of sweets, and handing it to Nelly with the words, "for my beloved future wife." At such moments the good old doctor was at least as happy as the recipient of his present.

After this they would chat together ; and he would make a point of impressing upon her, each time, the importance of taking great care of herself and obeying his instructions to the letter.

"The great thing is to take care of oneself," he would end by saying dogmatically ; "firstly, in order to preserve one's life as long as possible ; and, secondly, in order to secure health so that that life may be pleasant. If you have any griefs, my dear child, forget them ; or, better still, train yourself not to think of them. If you have not got any griefs, then, of course, you won't think of them, but get into the way of thinking of pleasant things, games, or——"

"What sort of games ?" asked Nelly.

"Oh !" said the doctor, thoughtfully, "Any nice appropriate games ; or, well, *anything* of that sort."

"But I don't like playing games," said Nelly. "I like new clothes much better."

"New clothes ? Oh, that's not nearly so nice ! One ought to take pleasure in the humbler amusements of life ; and, yes, perhaps you can like new clothes too."

"Will you give me many new dresses when I am your wife ?" asked Nelly.

"What an idea," said the doctor, frowning involuntarily. Nelly looked mischievous, and once, forgetting herself, she looked round at *me*, smiling ; "but I will," continued the doctor, "I'll make you a dress myself, if you deserve it."

"Shall I have to take powders every day, when I'm your wife ?"

"Oh, well—perhaps we shall let you off now and then for a treat !" said the old fellow, smiling. Nelly burst out laughing, and the doctor laughed too, watching the child's mirth with loving sympathy. "What a playful spirit she has," he continued to me ; but I still see signs of caprice and passion."

He was right. I could not, for the life of me, make out what was the matter with her. She seemed to wish to avoid talking to me, just as though I had been guilty of something in her

eyes; it was very bitter to me. I was cross myself, and occasionally passed a whole day without speaking a word to her; but on the following day I would feel ashamed. She often cried, and I had not the slightest idea how to comfort her. Occasionally she broke the silence. One day I came home just before dusk and caught Nelly hiding a book hastily under her pillow; it was my novel, which she had taken up from the table and begun to read during my absence. Why should she hide it? Just as though she were ashamed of reading it, I thought to myself. However, I did not show any signs of having observed her. A quarter of an hour afterwards, when I had gone into the next room for a minute, she jumped up quickly and put the book down again in its old place. When I came back I saw it lying there. The next minute she called me to her. Her voice seemed very much agitated; it was the fourth day that she had hardly spoken a word to me:

"Are you going to—to Natásha's to-day?" she asked me in a broken voice.

"Yes, Nelly. I *must* see her to-day," I said. Nelly was silent.

"Do you—love her very much?" she asked in a faint tone.

"Yes, Nelly, very much."

"So do I. I love her very much, too," she said, softly. Then followed silence for awhile again. "And I want to go and live with her," Nelly continued, looking timidly at me.

"That's impossible, Nelly," I said, considerably surprised.

"But why; don't you like living with me?"

"Why impossible?" she asked, blushing. "You are always trying to persuade me to go to her father's house, and I don't want to go there. Has she a servant?"

"Yes."

"Well, let her send the servant away, and I'll serve her instead. I'll do all her work and take no pay. I will love her, and I'll cook her dinners for her; tell her so to-day"

"Oh, Nelly, why have you got this idea into your head? And what must you think of her to suppose that she will let you come and be her cook? If she took you at all it would be as her equal, as her little sister."

"No, no! I don't want to go as her equal. I won't go like that."

"Why?" Nelly was silent; her lips were trembling; she seemed on the point of crying.

"That man whom she loves is going away from her and will leave her all alone, won't he?" she asked at last. I was much surprised.

"Why, how do you know that, Nelly?"

"You told me yourself once; and yesterday when Alexandra Semeónovna's husband was here I asked him about it, too, and he told me everything."

"How? Was Maslobóeff here in the morning?"

"Yes, he was," she replied, dropping her eyes.

"And why didn't you tell me that he had been?"

"So—" I thought for a minute. What on earth was this confounded Maslobóeff up to with his mysteries? I must see him and find him out.

"Well," I said, "and what would it matter to *you*, Nelly, if this man does leave Natásha and go away?"

"Why, you love her very much," she said, but without raising her eyes. "And if you love her so much I suppose you'll marry her when that other man goes away?"

"No, Nelly, she doesn't love me as I love her; and besides I—no, that will never be, Nelly."

"And I would have served you both, as your servant, and you would have lived and been happy together," she said almost in a whisper and looking away from me.

What *is* the matter; what *is* the matter with the child? I wondered. My whole soul yearned towards her. After this, Nelly relapsed into silence and said not another word the whole evening. When I went out she began to cry, and cried all the while I was away, so Alexandra told me afterwards, eventually falling asleep in tears. Even at night she cried and talked in her sleep.

From this day she was more morose and silent than ever, and never talked to me at all; it is true I caught occasional glances unexpectedly—when I found that she had her eyes fixed on my face with the greatest possible tenderness. But these transient moments went by, and Nelly seemed to be all the sulkier afterwards; she even changed towards the doctor. Meanwhile she had grown very nearly well, and at last the doctor allowed her to go out into the air, but only for a short while. It was fine, clear weather, and Holy Week, the season of Easter being very late this year. I went out early, having to be at Natásha's in good time; but I was to come back and take Nelly out for a walk. Meanwhile I left her alone.

But I cannot describe how fearful a shock awaited me at home. I had hurried back and found the door-key *outside*. I went in—there was nobody about ; my heart sank. I looked around and saw a scrap of paper with something written in pencil in a large uneven hand ; it was this—

“ I have left you and will never come back. But I love you very much.

“ Yours faithfully,  
“ NELLY.”

I gave a cry of despair and rushed from the house.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

I HAD not reached the street, and had not collected my thoughts sufficiently to know which way to turn or what to do, when the first thing I saw was a droshky drawn up at the street door and Alexandra Seméonovna getting out, holding Nelly by the hand. She held the child tight, as though she feared that she might run away again. I rushed to them. “ Nelly,” I cried, “ what is it ? Where did you go to ? Why did you go away ? ”

“ Don’t be in a hurry,” said Alexandra, “ let’s get into your lodging, and then you shall hear. Such things I have to tell you, Ivan Petrovitch,” she continued, “ you’ll be surprised. Come along ; you shall hear all.”

Her face bore evidence of news of importance.

“ Nelly, go and lie down a little,” she said, as we came in ; “ you are tired ; you have been so far for a little convalescent ; lie down, darling, lie down ! ” Then turning to me : “ You and I will leave her alone and let her go to sleep,” and she beckoned me into the kitchen. But Nelly would not lie down ; she sat on the bed and covered her face with both her hands. We left her, and Alexandra told me all about it ; afterwards I heard further details ; this is what had happened : having left my lodging, two hours before my return, Nelly had first made for the old doctor’s house, whose address she had found out

before. The old man told me afterwards that he quite froze when she turned up at his house, and all the while she was there he could not believe his eyes.

"I don't believe it really happened, now," he said afterwards, "and I never shall." Yet Nelly really had been to him. He was sitting in his study, quietly, over his coffee, in a dressing-gown, when she had suddenly rushed in, and thrown herself on his neck before he could utter a sound. She had cried, and embraced, and kissed him; kissed his hands, and earnestly, though very disconnectedly, entreated him to take her in, and let her live with him; she said she could not live with me any longer and had left me; that she was very unhappy; that she would never laugh at him again, or talk about new clothes, and would behave herself very well; she would learn to iron his shirts and wash them for him (probably she had thought out the whole speech on the way, or perhaps before); and that she would really be very obedient now, and take her medicine every day regularly; and that, if she had bothered him about marrying her, it was all nonsense; she never really thought of such a thing.

The old man was so stunned that he had sat the whole time with his mouth open, and raising his hand up and down, with a cigar between his fingers, which cigar he forgot all about and allowed to go out:

"My dear little girl," he had said, finding his tongue at last, "so far as I understand you, you are asking me to give you a place here, in my house. Impossible! you must see how little room I have here, and I am not rich; besides which—so unexpectedly—so sudden a descent. Besides, it seems you have run away from home. That is very wrong, very wrong! And you were only to go out for a short walk under the care of your benefactor, and here you are, leaving him in the lurch, and running all the way to my house when you ought to take care of yourself and, and—and—take your powders. And besides, I don't understand what's the matter."

Nelly would not hear him; she began all over again, crying and begging, but with no effect. The old man only grew more and more dazed, and understood less and less of the mystery. At last Nelly left him, with a cry of despair, and rushed out of the room. She went off to the Maslobóeffs next; she had their address also, and found them after some trouble. Maslobóeff was at home. Alexandra had wrung her hands

when she heard what Nelly had to say. To the question, why Nelly wanted to leave me, wasn't she happy with me? Nelly would not answer a word, but threw herself into an armchair, sobbing. She sobbed so—Alexandra told me—that she thought it would kill her then and there. Nelly begged to be taken *anyhow*; as cook, as housemaid, *anything*; she would learn to sweep the floor, wash the linen, anything they pleased. Alexandra Semeónovna thought they had better take her in until the mystery were solved, letting me know meanwhile where she was; but Maslobóeff would not hear of it, and made her bring the little truant straight back to me. On the way home Alexandra had caressed and kissed Nelly, which only made her cry the more; Alexandra had cried, too, out of sympathy, and so the two of them had driven along—crying together.

“But, Nelly, why, *why* don't you wish to live with him? Does he bully you?” Alexandra had asked her.

“Oh no! he is not unkind to me.”

“Why, then?”

“Oh! I don't want to live with him any more; I can't. I'm so bad to him, and he's always so good. I wouldn't be bad at your house, I would work,” she added, sobbing hysterically.

“But why are you bad with him, Nelly?”

“So, because——”

“And I never got anything more out of her,” said Alexandra, wiping her eyes. “What makes her like that? What do you think, Ivan Petrovitch?” We went into Nelly's room; she was lying crying there, with her face buried in the pillow. I knelt by her, and took her little hands and kissed them; she tore her hands from mine and sobbed the more. I did not know what to say. Just at this moment in came old Ikménief.

“I've come on business, Vánia,” he said. “How are you?” He glanced round, and observed, with amazement, that I was on my knees. The old fellow had been ill of late, he looked very white and thin; but he had scorned his illness, as though he wanted to show off to someone, and took no notice of his old wife's admonitions, and went about his affairs just as usual.

“Well, good-bye for the present,” said Alexandra, staring at the old man; “Philip Philipovitch, told me to come home as soon as possible; there is something going on at home, I'm



wanted; but I'll come in the evening and stay a couple of hours." She went out.

"Who's that?" asked the old man, who was evidently thinking of something else. I told him.

"Ah!" he said. "Look here, Vánia, this is what I came about." (I knew what he had come to talk over, and had been expecting his visit.) He came to talk to Nelly and myself about getting her to live at his house. Anna Andréevna had at last consented to take the orphan in. This concession had been the result of our private talks. I had told her that the sight of the poor child, whose mother had been cursed by her father, might arouse in old Ikménief other and softer thoughts. I made this idea so acceptable to her that she had now begun to worry the old man to get hold of the child. Ikménief was glad enough to busy himself about it; firstly, because he liked to please the old lady, and secondly, because he had his own ideas on the subject—ideas which I shall have to refer to later on.

I have already said that Nelly did not like the old man at his first visit, and I had observed, since, that a kind of *hate* was visible in her face whenever the name of Ikménief was mentioned.

The old man plunged at once *in medias res*; he went straight up to Nelly, who still lay with her face buried in the pillow, and, taking her hand in his, asked her whether she would like to come and live with him and be his little daughter.

"I had a daughter once, and loved her better than my own life," said the old gentleman, "but now she is with me no more; she is dead! Would you like to take her place in our house, and in my heart?" And tears stood in his eyes, his poor old sunken feverish eyes.

"No, I don't want to," said Nelly, not raising her head.

"Why not, dear child? You have no home of your own; Vánia, here, can't keep you in his rooms for ever, and you shall be like in your own father's home with me."

"I don't want to because you are wicked—yes—wicked, wicked!" she cried, raising her head and sitting down on the bed, opposite the old gentleman. "I am wicked myself, wickeder than other people—but you are worse than I am." Saying this, Nelly grew very pale and her eyes flashed, her lips trembled and became white and her mouth curved with some feeling of emotion. The old man stared amazed at her.

"Oh, yes, you are," she went on, "you are wickeder than anybody, because you won't forgive your daughter. You want to forget her entirely, and to take another child into your heart; as if you could really forget your own daughter, and as if you could really love me.. Why, you would look at me and immediately remember that I was not your own, and that you once had your very own daughter whom you forgot of your own accord because you are a cruel man. I don't want to live with cruel people. I won't—I won't do it!" Nelly sobbed, and glanced at me. "The day after to-morrow," she continued, "will be Easter, and everybody kisses one another,\* and everybody makes peace and forgives injuries at Easter, but you—I know, you will be the only one who—oh! *cruel, cruel* man, go away!"

She burst into tears, I think she must have prepared this speech beforehand on the chance of Ikménief coming again to invite her to his house. The old man was much struck with her words and grew very pale. An expression of great pain came over his face.

"And why does everybody bother their heads about me like this? I won't have it—I don't want it," she cried suddenly with great passion. "I shall go out into the streets and beg."

"Nelly, dear Nelly, what is the matter with you?" I cried involuntarily; but my exclamation only added oil to the flames.

"Yes I will," she cried, sobbing, "I shall go and beg—I won't stay here. My mother had to beg, and when she died she told me, 'be poor, beg alms, it is much better than—than—it's no shame to beg.' I don't beg of any one person but of all. I shall go out and beg from everybody I meet. I won't stay here. I'm wicked—I'm worse than anyone. There! Look how wicked I am!" And Nelly, quite unexpectedly, seized a cup from the table and smashed it on the floor.

"There! Now, it's broken," she cried, looking at me with a sort of triumphant stare. "There are only two cups and I shall break the other one too. What will you drink your tea out of then, eh?" She was in such a state of rage, and seemed to take a delight in her rage too; as though she felt how wrong and shameful of her it was, and at the same time spurred herself on to further paroxysms.

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\* All orthodox Russians of both sexes meeting acquaintance on Easter day, or within the octave following, interchange three kisses, with the greeting, "Christos Voskres," Christ is risen!

"She must be ill, Vánia," said the old man, "or else—I don't understand the child. Good bye." He took his hat, and pressed my hand; the poor old fellow was quite struck down, Nelly had wounded him dreadfully. My anger was roused.

"And you couldn't pity the poor old man, Nelly?" I cried, when we were left alone. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? No, you are not a good girl; you were quite right when you called yourself wicked!"

I ran out after the old gentleman just as I was, without a hat. I wanted to go as far as the gate with him and say a soothing word or two. As I ran out the vision of Nelly's face followed me, pale—deadly pale, from my reproachful words. I soon caught up old Ikménief.

"The poor child has been wounded herself, believe me, Vánia; she must have her own grief, and I must needs begin to talk about mine," he said smiling bitterly. "I stirred up her wound. They say a full man can't understand a hungry one. I will add the remark, that hungry ones can't always make each other out either."

I wanted to speak of some other subject; but the old fellow only waved me away, "Oh come, come!" he said, "none of your soothing of me. I don't require it! Much better go back and see that your little friend doesn't run away; she looked as if she might." And he left me and went off down the street with quick steps, gesticulating, and knocking his stick against the pavement.

He little knew how true a prophet he had been! What a state of mind I was in when I came back and found Nelly flown again! I rushed out and looked for her on the stairs; called to her; knocked up the neighbours and asked if they had seen her. I couldn't and wouldn't believe that she had run away again! How could she have done so? There was but one gate to the house, she must have got out past us as we were talking. But soon, to my grief, I remembered that she might easily have hidden somewhere near the bottom of the stairs, waiting till I passed to go up again, and then slipped out. She could not have gone far, in any case! In a state of the greatest agitation I set to work to seek her again, but I left the door open in case of emergencies.

I went to Maslobóeff's first; but neither he nor Alexandra was at home. Leaving a note there, apprising them of this new trouble, and begging them, if Nelly came to their house,

to let me know at once, I went off to the doctor's; he was not at home either; but his servant told me that Nelly had not been again. What was to be done? I drove off to Bubnoff's and was informed by my old friend, the coffin-maker, that Mrs. Bubnoff was in gaol for some offence, and that Nelly had not been seen "since that day." I ran off to Maslobóeff's again, tired and bewildered. The same answer, no one at home! My note lay on the table. They had not been back yet. What should I do next?

In deadly anxiety I went home again; it was late in the evening now. I ought to be at Natásha's; she had asked me specially to come. I had eaten nothing all day. These worries about Nelly had so harassed me. What could be the matter with her, I wondered! Could it be the symptoms of some malady coming on? Perhaps she was mad, or was just *going* mad? But—oh my God! Where was I to look for her next?

I had hardly uttered this exclamation when I looked up, and there was Nelly! She was standing on the V—— bridge, a few paces from me. She was standing by a lamp-post, and did not see me. I wanted to run straight to her, instinctively, but stopped myself. What *can* she be doing here? I thought. However as I was sure of not losing her now, I resolved to wait a while and watch her. Ten minutes went by, and she stood still, watching the passers-by. At length an old man passed, a well-dressed old gentleman, and Nelly went up to him. He put his hand into his pocket without stopping and placed something in her hand; she bowed and thanked him.

I cannot describe my feelings at this moment! I felt as though something very dear to me, and very precious, had just been put to shame and spat upon before my face. I wept for mortification and sorrow. Yes! tears for poor Nelly, though, at the same time, my heart was full of indignation. She had no need to beg; she was not deserted, or left to her fate by anyone; she had run away, not from cruelty or unkindness; but from her best friends who loved her well. She seemed to want to frighten and amaze us with her caprices; just as though she really wished to show off before me. And yet, she was alone here; she could not suppose any of us had seen her begging. Surely she could not be begging for pleasure! What could she want to beg for—what could she require money for?

Having received the money given to her, Nelly came away,

and made for the brilliantly lighted window of a shop near at hand. Here she stood a few yards away and counted her money; she seemed to have a good deal of money in her hand, evidently she had been begging since morning. Holding the coins tightly in her hand she crossed the road, and went into a small general store shop. I followed, and stood at the door of the shop, waiting to see what she wanted there. I saw her lay her money on the counter, and the shopman handed her a cup, very like the one she had broken in the morning, in order to show Ikménief and myself how wicked she could be! The cup cost about fifteen copecks, perhaps less. The shopman tied it up and gave it to Nelly, who came hastily out of the shop again, with an expression of great satisfaction upon her face.

"Nelly!" I cried, when she came abreast of me. "Nelly!"

She trembled and looked up at me—the cup slipped out of her hand and was smashed on the pavement. Nelly was very pale; but when she looked at me and saw that I had seen all and understood it, she flushed; her blush bore evidence of the shame she felt at the moment. I took her hand and led her home; it was not far to go. We did not speak a word on the way. Arrived at home, I sat down, and Nelly stood before me thoughtful and confused, pale as death, and with her eyes fixed on the ground. She evidently could not look me in the face.

"Nelly, you have been begging?"

"Yes," she whispered, and bent her head still lower.

"You wanted to get money in order to replace the cup you broke this morning?"

"Yes."

"Why, did I reproach you, or say a single unkind word about your breaking that cup? Don't you see, Nelly, how bad and selfish an act this is on your part? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? aren't you——?"

"I *am* ashamed," she whispered, scarcely audibly, and the tears came trickling down her cheeks.

"Oh, Nelly," I said, "if I have done anything to offend you, you must forgive me, and we'll be friends again!" She looked at me; the tears gushed from her eyes, and she threw herself into my arms. At this moment Alexandra Semeónovna rushed into the room.

"What——she's at home? Oh, Nelly, Nelly! What *have* you

been doing! However, it's a very good thing she's at home again. Where did you find her, Ivan Petrovitch? Thank God you *did* find her!"

I signalled to Alexandra to ask nothing just now, and she understood me. Then I took leave of Nelly very affectionately, and begged kind little Alexandra to sit with her until I came home again. I was very late and in a great hurry to go.

This evening was to decide our fate. There was a great deal to talk over with Natásha; but I managed to edge in a word or two about Nelly, and told Natásha of the day's episodes, with all particulars. My report struck Natásha very forcibly, and interested her exceedingly.

"Do you know, Vánia, I believe she is in love with you," she said after a thoughtful pause.

"What? How could that be?" I asked in amazement.

"Yes! I think so. This is the beginning of a woman's love, Vánia."

"Oh, nonsense, Natásha! Why, she's a mere child!"

"Who will soon be fourteen years old—yes. This obduracy of hers is caused by your not understanding that she loves you, and very likely she does not understand it herself either. Her trouble has much that is childish about it; but, much that is very serious too. The chief point is, she is very jealous of your love for me. You love me so much that I daresay you only talk and think of me at home, to the neglect of herself. She has remarked this, and it has wounded her. Perhaps she longs to talk to you and unbosom herself before you, but cannot, is ashamed to; does not understand her own feelings, waits for an opportunity; while you, instead of giving her such opportunity, avoid her and come out to see me; and even when she was ill you left her for whole days at a time. She worries about all this, and what pains her most of all is that you notice nothing. Why, here you are, at this very moment, leaving her alone for my sake! She will be ill to-morrow again for this. How could you leave her? Go back to her quick."

"I would not have left her, but ——"

"I know! I asked you to come myself. But go now, do go!"

"I will go, of course," I said, "but I don't believe a word of your theory."

"But, don't you see, Vánia, all her story is so very different from other people's around us. Think of all she has been

through, and you'll believe what I say. She was not brought up as you and I were, Vânia."

However, I got home very late after all. Alexandra told me that Nelly had cried very much again, just as she had the night before, and had cried herself to sleep. I thanked Alexandra for her kindness, and sat down at Nelly's pillow. I was very sad, my conscience smote me for having left her at such a moment. I sat and thought till late into the night. Ah, me! It was a fateful period, this! I must go on and tell what had happened during these two last weeks.

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## CHAPTER V.

**A**FTER the memorable evening of my interview with the prince at the restaurant I spent several days in continuous agony of anxiety regarding Natásha. What did this abominable prince mean by those threats of his against her, and how did he mean to wreak his vengeance upon her? I came to the conclusion that his menaces were not empty words, but that—at least so long as her connection with Aleósha existed—he could really injure her very considerably. He is such a malicious, revengeful scoundrel, I thought, that it is impossible to suppose he will fail to visit any insult to himself with his vengeance.

At all events, he had insisted on one point, which was evidently a *sine qua non* with him, namely, that the connection between Aleósha and Natásha must absolutely be broken, and that I must prepare Natásha for a speedy parting, and prepare her so that there should be none of what he called that "pastoralising and Schillerising." He seemed to be anxious, too, that Aleósha should continue to look up to him, and regard him as a tender father. All this was necessary for his intended future manipulation of Kátia's money. So that I had to prepare Natásha for an approaching parting. But I noticed a great change in Natásha. She was no longer outspoken with me, as of old; in fact, she did not even seem to trust me any longer. My attempts at consolation only bored her. My questions worried her, even angered her. I would sit there and look at her; she

would walk up and down, up and down, with her arms folded, pale, miserable, thoughtful, oblivious of everything, apparently unconscious of my very presence. When she happened to look at me (and she seemed to avoid even so much notice of me) her face darkened with an expression of annoyance, and she looked away again at once. I felt that she was thinking out some plan of her own for parting with Aleósha. And how could the poor girl be anything else but irritable and cross under the circumstances? I felt quite sure that she had made up her mind to a parting. So that I could not, I did not dare try to speak to her or comfort her at this time, and I awaited the end of it all with anguish in my heart.

As for her conduct to me, though it pained me very much, I was sure of my good Natásha, through it all. I knew what she was suffering, and that she could not help it. Every outside interference at this time annoyed her and made her cross. Under such circumstances as these the interference of friends who know one's secrets is most annoying. I knew that at the last moment Natásha would come back to me, and that she would look for sympathy and consolation, as usual, in *my* heart.

As to my conversation with the prince, I told her nothing about it; it would only have disturbed her more. I merely said that I had been to the countess's with the prince, and that I had persuaded myself that the latter was a thorough-going scoundrel. She did not ask about him, luckily; but she listened greedily to all I had to say about Kátia. She said nothing when I had finished my story, but her pale cheek flushed very red, and all that day she was extremely agitated. I concealed nothing about Kátia, and admitted that she had made a great impression even upon me. And why should I have concealed? Natásha would have guessed it all the same, and I should merely have made her angry. So I told her all the details I could, and did my best to anticipate her questions. I knew it would be painful, it must be, to ask questions as to the perfections and virtues of her rival.

I thought she did not know that Aleósha, by command of the prince, was to escort the countess and Kátia to the country; and I worried my head to invent some plan of breaking the news gently. What was my amazement, then, when at the very first word Natásha stopped me, and said that I need not trouble to soften the news, because she had known all about it for five days.



"Good heavens!" I cried. "Why, who told you?"

"Aleósha."

"What, Aleósha already?"

"Yes, and I have quite determined what to do," she said hastily, and as it were impatiently, as though she desired to show me that she did not wish to go on with the conversation.

Aleósha came pretty often to see Natásha, but only for a minute or two at a time. Only once did he stay for an hour or more. I was not present then. He generally came in looking sad, and gazed timidly at her; but she was always so kind and tender to him that he immediately forgot to be sad, and was as jolly as possible. He began coming to me, too, nearly every day; he could not be alone with his anxieties for a minute at a time, and was continually dropping in to be consoled.

What could I say to him? He reproached me for my coldness and want of sympathy, said I was malicious, cried, and went off to Kátia, where he doubtless found all the comfort he needed.

On the day on which Natásha told me she knew all about his approaching departure (that was a week after my talk with the prince), he came flying into my room, embraced me, fell on my neck, and sobbed like a child. I kept quiet, and waited to hear what he would say.

"Oh, I am a low blackguard, Vánia," he began at last; "save me from myself! I do not weep because I am such a blackguard, but because poor Natásha has to suffer for my sake. Why, I'm leaving her to sorrow! Vánia, my good friend, tell me, do tell me, which do I love best, Kátia or Natásha?"

"I can't decide, Aleósha," I said; "you must know best."

"No, no, Vánia; I'm not such a fool as that. I know you can't; but the thing is, I can't answer the question myself. You see, you are an outsider; perhaps you can see clearer than I can. Well, even if you don't know, tell me what you *think*."

"I think you love Kátia best."

"You think so? No, no! It's not true—I don't. You are quite wrong—I love Natásha boundlessly—I will never—never leave her, not for anything in the world. I told Kátia so, and she quite agrees with me! Why don't you speak?"

There, I saw you smile! Oh Vânia! Vânia! you never give me any comfort when I want it. I'm off! Good-bye."

He rushed out of the room, making a great impression upon the astonished Nelly, who had listened quietly to our conversation. At that time she was still ill, and was in bed and under treatment. Aleósha never talked to her, and during his visits he scarcely took the slightest notice of her. A couple of hours later he turned up a second time and I was amazed at his happy face. He threw himself on my neck again and embraced me.

"It's all settled," he cried. "All the difficulties are settled. I went straight from here to Natásha, I felt so unhappy, as if I couldn't exist without her—I fell on my knees when I saw her, and kissed her feet. I had to do it, I needed it. Without it I should have died of anguish. She embraced me silently and burst into tears. Then I told her outright that I loved Kátia better than herself. She said nothing, but caressed and soothed me—me! who had told her that. Oh, Vânia! and she *can* soothe one. I wept out all my grief to her. I told her that I loved Kátia very much, but that, however, and whomever I might love I should never be able to do without *her*. I should die.—Yes, Vânia, I should. I couldn't live a day without her, I feel it. So we decided to be married as soon as possible; and as that cannot be done before I go away, we have fixed the day of my return for the wedding, the first of June. My father will give his consent, there's no doubt of that. As for Kátia—what's to be done? I simply can't do without Natásha, so we'll just get married and then go down to where Kátia is together. . . ."

Poor Natásha. What it must have cost her to comfort this boy, to sit there by him and hear his admission and to think out for the benefit of the naive young egotist, the cock-and-bull idea of a speedy marriage. He only went to Natásha because his wretched weak mind could not support any trouble alone.

All the same, as the time grew nearer for his separation from Natásha he became more and more depressed again, and continually dropped in to see me and pour out his tale of griefs. When the day was close at hand he attached himself so much to Natásha that he could not bear to leave her for a whole day much less for a month and a half. He was perfectly convinced in his own mind, to the very last moment, that he was only

going to leave her for these six weeks, and that at the expiration of that time they would be married.

As for Natásha, she understood but too well, that this was the turning point of her destiny ; that Aleósha would never come back to her again, and that so it must be.

The day of the separation approached. Natásha was very ill ; pale, with inflamed eyes and dry lips, now talking to herself, and now glaring keenly at me, she spoke not a word, and answered no questions, but shook like a leaf when Aleósha's voice was heard at the door. She blushed red as she hurried up to him and embraced him, and kissed him, and burst out laughing. Aleósha looked at her with some anxiety, soothed her, assured her that he was only going away for a little while, and that then they should be married. Natásha made the most heroic exertions to be brave and keep down her tears ; she did not cry before him. Once he had said that he must leave her money for the whole time of his absence, and that she must not be anxious because the prince had promised to give him plenty for his journey. Natásha frowned. When we were left alone I told her that I had a hundred-and-fifty roubles for her, in case of emergencies. She did not ask where the money came from. This happened two days before the parting, and the day before the first and last interview between Kátia and Natásha. Kátia had sent a note asking if she might call next day ; she wrote to me also and requested me to be present at the interview. I at once resolved to go to Natásha's at twelve, the time fixed—in spite of all worries or detentions. And just now there were enough of both, for, not to speak of Nelly, I had had great troubles with the old Ikméniefs these last days

These troubles had begun a week before. Anna Andréévna wrote and asked me to put everything aside and come *at once* to see her on most important business. I went off immediately and found her pacing the room in feverish agitation, waiting in fear and trembling for the old man's return. As usual, it took me a long time to extract the reason for her excitement, though evidently every moment was precious. At last, amid reproaches for my absence and "indifference to their griefs," she informed me that Ikménief had been in such a fearful state of agitation for the last three days, that she could not describe it. "Simply, not like himself," she said, "at night, though in high fever, he gets up and prays secretly on his knees before the ikon ; he talks in his sleep ; he begins to eat

his dinner and forgets where his fork is; you ask him something or other, and he answers about something different; he leaves the house every other minute; he always declares it's on business, and that he must see his lawyer. To-day he shut himself up in his study: 'I have to make out an important document,' he said. 'What sort of a document will *you* turn out,' I thought, 'when you can't even find your fork at dinner?' However, I looked through the keyhole, and there he was, writing away and crying at the same time. 'What sort of a business letter can it be to make you cry like that?' I thought.

"Well, suddenly he got up, dashed his pen on the table, flushed as red as fire, seized his hat and went out. 'I'll come back in a few minutes,' he shouted to me. As soon as he had gone, I went to the writing-table and saw a quantity of legal documents lying about, papers which he will never let me even touch. I had often asked him to let me dust the table. 'Not a bit of it,' he would cry, 'keep your hands off.' He has grown so irritable, here in Petersburg, and shouts so. Well, I looked about for the paper which he had been writing; I knew he had not taken it with him, for he had stuck it under some other documents when he got up to go out. Here's what I found, Vánia. Look at it!"

She gave me a sheet of letter paper, written all over, but in such a dreadful hand that it was impossible to make it out in parts. Poor old man! from the very first line it was very evident to whom the letter was addressed.

It was to Natásha; to his beloved Natásha. It began warmly and tenderly; he promised her his forgiveness and begged her to come back to him. It was difficult to make anything out of it for it was crossed and recrossed, and blotted and corrected to such an extent; but it was easy to discern that the warm impulse of loving feeling, which had made him take up his pen and write the first few burning sentences, had soon changed for another; the old man went on to reproach his daughter, to paint her crime in the most vivid colours; he threw her obstinacy in her teeth—he reproached her for her unfeelingness in having acted without, perhaps, even thinking of what she was doing to her father and mother—he threatened her with punishments and curses, and ended by insisting that she should come home submissively and instantly, declaring that then, and only then, could she hope for forgiveness—when she showed by her

dutiful and humble bearing in the bosom of her family that she had deserved it at their hands.

It was clear that, after the first few lines, he had regarded his first affectionate, impulsive words as mere weakness, and had thought it incumbent upon him to shame her; out of which grew the sentiment of wounded pride, which again resulted in the fury and reproaches of the last page.

The old lady stood before me, with hands folded, waiting in anxious haste to hear what I thought of the letter.

I told her how the matter appeared to my mind. I said it was clear that old Ikménief could not live any longer without Natásha, and that we might regard, as certain, the fact of their ultimate reconciliation. I pointed out that the adverse end of the law-suit had upset him; and showed how the prince's triumph over him must have upset the poor old gentleman, and how his self-love must have been wounded. I said that, under these worries, it was only natural that he should seek about for sympathy, and his heart naturally turned towards her whom he had loved better than all the world. Besides this, he probably knew that Aleósha was soon about to leave her, for he was cognisant of everything that went on there by some mysterious source of information which he possessed.

"He must feel," I said, "how dreadful is her position just now, and how much she is in need of consolation. And yet, for all this, he could not bring himself to take the initiative; he felt that he had been humiliated and offended by his daughter. He could not help feeling, perhaps, that it was not she who was taking the first step, that very likely she was not even thinking of her parents and of the necessity for reconciliation with them. That is probably what the old man is now thinking," I ended by saying, "and therefore he did not finish his letter; and I am much afraid that more humiliations and troubles may result from all this, and that the reconciliation may only be thrown further forward."

The old lady cried as she heard me say this. I told her that I must be off to Natásha's at once—that I was late already. At this she started and said:

"Why, I've forgotten the chief thing, look here! Taking the paper out from beneath the others. I accidentally spilled the ink-pot over it."

And sure enough one corner was covered with ink, and the old lady was dreadfully afraid that her husband might infer that

somebody had been at his papers, and that she had read his letter to Natásha. Her fears were well founded, for it might very well result from this accident that the old man, knowing she had read his secret, might, in an access of angry pride, steel his heart against that act of forgiveness towards which he was tending.

However, on thinking it over, I told the old lady not to worry herself about it. He had risen from writing the letter in such a state of agitation, that he probably would not remember whether he had spilled the ink himself or not. Having comforted Anna Andréevna as best I could, we put the letter back in its old place, and I began to talk about Nelly as I prepared to leave. It struck me that the poor little orphan, whose mother had been, like Natásha, repudiated and accursed by her own father, might very likely, by a vivid and tragic narrative of her former life, and of the death of her mother, be able to so touch the old man's heart that he would be brought to view Natásha's case more charitably.

All was prepared and ripe in his heart; anguish for his daughter had begun to overcome his pride and wounded self-love; it only remained to deal the blow which would set free the streams of his love and break down the opposition of pride, and it seemed to me that Nelly could effect this. The old lady listened with the greatest attention; her whole face lighted up with hope and ecstasy. She immediately began to upbraid me with having kept this idea to myself so long; she asked me question after question about Nelly, and ended with the solemn promise that she would herself beg the old man to take the child in. She seemed to have begun to love Nelly sincerely. She was so sorry the child was ill, and asked after her symptoms; she made me take back a pot of jam for her, and ran to the storeroom herself to get it; she gave me five roubles in case I should not have enough for the doctor, and when I refused to take the money she would not be satisfied until I had allowed her to rummage about her trunks for linen and clothes which would suit the little orphan; she longed to give her something.

I went to Natásha's next. Mounting the last steps, which I have described already as of a corkscrew character, I observed a man standing at her door, just about to knock; but who, hearing my footsteps, waited a moment; and then, evidently changing his mind after some vacillation, left the door and

came downstairs again. I brushed up against him on one of the steps and what was my amazement to recognise old Ikménief. It was very dark on the stairs, even in day-time, and as he stood with his back to the wall to let me pass, I remember noticing the strange blaze of his eyes as they stared intently at me. It seemed to me that he grew very red indeed; at all events he was dreadfully confused, even bewildered.

"Hallosa, Vánia! Is it you?" he asked, in broken tones. "I was just coming to see a man I know—a writer—about business. He has moved into rooms somewhere in this house; not on this stair though, I think. I must have made a mistake; good-bye." And he went downstairs as fast as his old legs could carry him.

I resolved to tell Natásha nothing about this meeting at present, but to make a point of telling her all about it the moment she was left alone, after Aleósha should have gone. She was so worried and anxious just now, that I felt she would not appreciate the importance and significance of the incident so well to-day as she would when the supreme moment of her sorrow should have overwhelmed her.

I longed to go and tell the old lady, Mrs. Ikménief, about my meeting her husband on Natásha's stairs; but I did not go for three days, as I was afraid the old man might be disconcerted to see me and might think that I had come on purpose to talk over the *rencontre*. When I did go he received me very kindly, though he was looking sad and pale as usual, and began talking about his affairs at once.

"What were you doing up at the top of those stairs when I met you the other day?" he suddenly asked, carelessly enough, apparently, but not looking me in the face.

"Oh, a friend of mine lives there," I said, avoiding his eyes.

"Ah, I was looking for that writer fellow—Astafief, you know; they told me he lived in that house, but he, doesn't, I find. Well, I was telling you about the law-suit; at the Senate they decided that—" and so on. The old man was blushing deeply.

I told Anna Andréevna all about it to rejoice the poor old lady's heart. I warned her, however, not to look at her husband with any significant expressions of intelligence; nor to sigh, or drop hints, or do anything that could show him that she knew of his last sally. The old lady was so delighted that at first she could not believe me. She told me in her turn

that she had asked him indirectly about taking in the orphan, but that he had said nothing, although he had been the one to wish to have her before. We decided that to-morrow she should put the question to him *directly*, without hinting or beating about the bush ; but it so happened that next day both of us were in a state of the greatest alarm and disturbance. The reason was this. Ikménief went to see the official who had had the business part of the lawsuit to manage. This person informed him that he had had an interview with the prince, who had told him that, though he meant to keep Ikméniefka, yet, "in consequence of certain family circumstances," he had decided to indemnify Ikménief to the extent of ten thousand roubles.

The old gentleman came straight away in a dreadful state of perturbation to see me ; his eyes were flashing with rage. He called me out of my room on to the stairs outside, and began at once to insist upon it that I must be off *instantly* to the prince, and hand him a letter challenging him to fight. I was so overpowered with the suddenness of this request, that I could not collect my thoughts. I began by trying to dissuade him ; but the old man became so wildly furious that he very nearly fainted. I ran in for a glass of water ; but when I came out again Ikménief had gone.

Next day I went to see him, but he was not at home ; he disappeared for three whole days.

On the third day we found out all about it. It appears that the old man had gone direct from my house to the prince's, but had not found him at home. He left a note in which he stated that he had heard what the prince had said to the official at the Senate—that he considered those words a deadly insult to himself, that he thought the prince a scoundrel, that in consequence of these facts he now challenged him to mortal combat, warning the prince that if he dared to refuse to meet him, he (Ikménief) would find a way of disgracing the prince publicly !

Anna Andréevna told me that he came home in such a state of agitation that he had to take to his bed. He was very gentle with her, but answered scarcely anything to her questions ; it was very evident that he was waiting impatiently, with *feverish* impatience, she said, for something. Next morning a note came by post ; he read it, and then gave a cry and seized his head with his hands ; poor Anna Andréevna nearly died



of fright. He next took up his hat and stick and rushed away. The letter was from the prince. He drily, shortly, and politely informed Ikménief that he was responsible to no one for his words to the clerk at the Senate. That though he was very sorry for Ikménief's disappointment in having lost his case, yet, in spite of all his sympathy, he could not recognise the justice of the theory that the loser of a lawsuit was entitled to call out his opponent to mortal combat from feelings of revenge!

As to the *public shame* with which Ikménief had threatened him, the prince assured his correspondent that there would not and could not be anything of the kind, because Ikménief's letter should at once be forwarded to the proper quarter, and the police forewarned to take all necessary steps to preserve order and the public peace.

Ikménief had rushed off, letter in hand, to the prince's house. The prince was not at home, but the footman informed Ikménief that the former was now to be found at Count N.'s. Without losing much time in thought the old man hurried away to Count N.'s. The count's hall-porter stopped him as he ran upstairs, and the enraged old man struck him with his stick. He was immediately seized and dragged to the door, where he was handed over to the police and locked up. The count was informed of the occurrence, and when the prince, who was with him, explained to the sensual old man that this was the same Ikménief, father of that Natásha Nicolaevna, of whom he had told him some racy stories, the old count roared with laughter, and his anger very soon evaporated. It was determined to allow the old man to be released at once; but, in point of fact, he was only let out on the third day, and then his detainers informed him (no doubt by the prince's instructions) that the prince had interfered to persuade Count N. to excuse him.

The old man came home like one bereft of his senses; he threw himself down on his bed and lay like a log for a full hour; he then raised himself, and solemnly informed Anna Andréevna, to her immeasurable despair, that he held his daughter accursed for ever and ever, and would never more give her a father's blessing!

Anna Andréevna was in a dreadful state of woe, but day and night she tended the old man, bathed his temples with vinegar, and kept ice on his head. He became feverish and

delirious. I only left the house myself at about three in the morning. However, next day, Ikménief himself turned up to take Nelly away with him; the result of which attempt I have already described. The scene with her disturbed him very much, and he took to his bed again. All this happened on Good Friday, the day appointed for Kátia's visit to Natásha, and the eve of Aleósha's departure from St. Petersburg.

I was present at the meeting: it took place early in the morning, before old Ikménief had been to my rooms, and before the first of Nelly's flights, which I have described.

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## CHAPTER VI.

ALÉOSHA came an hour before-hand to advise Natásha of Kátia's coming. I happened to arrive just at the moment when Kátia's carriage drove up. With Kátia was the old French lady, the companion, who, after much teasing and persuasion, had at last consented to accompany her. She even allowed Kátia to go up alone with Aleósha, and waited for her in the carriage. Kátia called to me and asked me to send Aleósha out. I found Natásha and Aleósha both crying upstairs. Hearing that Kátia had come, Natásha rose, wiped her eyes, and stood waiting at the door in deep agitation. She was dressed all in white this morning, her thick dark hair being brushed back and confined in a knot behind, the way I loved to see her hair done. Noticing that I had stayed she asked me to go and meet her guest with Aleósha.

"I have not been able to come before this," Kátia said to me, as we went upstairs. "I have been so watched and spied upon; I have taken a fortnight to persuade Madame Albert. And you, Ivan Petrovitch, you haven't been *once* to see me! I couldn't write to you, and I didn't much care to, for one can't explain things in a letter. But *how* I have wanted to see you! Good gracious, how my heart is beating!"

"The staircase is so steep," I said.

"Yes, perhaps that's it," she said, "but do you think Natásha Nicolaevna will be angry with me?"

"No; why should she?"

"Yes, indeed! Why should she? But I shall see for myself directly, so it's not much use asking."

She had my arm; she had become very pale, and was, I thought, very much alarmed about this ordeal. She paused to take breath at the last flight, then glanced at me and went up the rest of the way with decision. She stopped me at the door and whispered—

"I shall just go in and tell her that I trusted her so completely that I came to see her without any fear. Oh, what am I saying—such nonsense—as if I don't know what a generous creature Natásha is?"

She went in timidly, as though she had been guilty of some evil towards Natásha, and gazed intently at the latter. But Natásha smiled at her at once. Then Kátia went quickly up to her, took her hand, and pressed her own rosy lips to Natásha's. Then, and before she had said a word to Natásha, she turned to Aleósha and begged him to leave us alone for half-an-hour or so.

"Don't you be angry, Aleósha," she added, "because I have something very serious and important to talk over with Natásha, and you mustn't hear it. Be a good boy, and go. You stay, please, Ivan Petrovitch, you must hear all we have to say."

"Let's sit down," she said, when Aleósha had gone out. "I will sit here, for I want to have a good look at you first."

She sat down nearly opposite to Natásha and for some moments looked fixedly and intently at her face. Natásha answered the gaze with an involuntary smile.

"I have seen your photograph," Kátia said at last; "Aleósha showed it to me."

"Well, am I like my portrait?"

"You are prettier," said Kátia, seriously and with decision.

"I thought you must be much nicer than your portrait."

"Really and you—how pretty you are!" said Natásha.

"I? Oh no; you *dear* girl," Kátia added, taking Natásha's hand in hers and holding it close; and so they sat awhile, silent and looking into each other's eyes.

"Look here, dear," said Kátia at last, "we have only half-an-hour, Madame Albert would not give me more, and we have so much to talk about. I want—I ought—Well, I'll just ask you plainly. Do you love Aleósha *very much*?"

"Yes, very much."

"Then, if you love him so well, you ought to wish for his happiness before everything," she added timidly and scarcely audibly.

"Yes, and I do wish him to be happy."

"That's so; but the question is, can I, shall I be able to make him happy? Have I the right to talk so, since I am taking him away from yourself? If you think, and we decide now, that he would be happier with you than with me, then, then, I——"

"Oh, it is decided already, dear Kátia; you must see that it's all decided already," cried Natásha softly, and with her head bent low; evidently the conversation was very painful to her.

Kátia had prepared, seemingly, a long dissertation upon the subject as to who was best fitted to insure Aleósha's happiness and which of them ought to yield to the other; but after Natásha's answer she saw, clearly enough, that the question was, indeed, decided already, and that there was no need of any further discussion. With her pretty lips apart, and with eyes full of surprise and tender pity, she gazed at Natásha, who still held her hand in her own.

"And you, do you love him *very* much?" asked Natásha at length.

"Yes! And—yes, I came partly for the sake of asking you this question. *Why* do you love him so much? What is it in him that you love so?"

"I don't know," said Natásha, and a kind of bitter impatience betrayed itself in her tone.

"Do you think him clever?" said Kátia, again.

"No, I simply—well, I love him, that's all."

"So do I. I am always half sorry for him."

"I feel the same," said Natásha.

"What am I to do with him, now? How he could ever have left you for me is what I *cannot* understand," cried Kátia. "Now that I have seen you I realise how strange it is that he should have done this."

Natásha answered nothing, but sat with her eyes fixed on the ground. Kátia was silent for a minute, then she quietly rose from her chair and embraced her rival; they both cried as they kissed each other again. Kátia sat down on the arm of Natásha's chair and kept her own arm round the neck of the latter while she kissed her hands.

"If you only knew how much I love you," she said, sobbing. "We will be sisters, and we'll always write to each other, and I shall love you always—always, ever so much."

"Has he said anything about our wedding in June?" asked Natásha.

"Oh yes, he says that you have agreed to it; of course that was just to comfort him, wasn't it?"

"Of course."

"So I understood it. I shall love him very much, Natásha, and I will write and tell you about everything; I think he will very soon be my husband now, things are tending that way so fast; they all want it so much. And you, dearest Natásha, you'll go back to your own home, won't you?"

Natásha did not reply, but quietly kissed her again, very affectionately. "Be happy, dear," she said.

"You too! Oh, you too!" cried Kátia. At this moment the door opened, and Aleósha came in. He had been unable to wait the full half-hour; and now, seeing them both embracing each other, and both weeping, he feebly fell on his knees before the two girls.

"What are you crying about, Aleósha?" said Natásha, stoutly. "Is it because you and I are going to part for awhile? Pooh, pooh! it isn't for long; why, you'll be back in June."

"And then you'll be married, you know," Kátia put in hurriedly, to soothe Aleósha's feelings.

"But I can't! I *can't* leave you, even for a day, Natásha. I shall die without you; you don't know how precious you are to me now, just now especially."

"Well, look here, you can do this," said Natásha brightly. "The countess will stay some days in Moscow on her way down, won't she?"

"Oh, yes, nearly a week," said Kátia.

"Well, that's capital; Aleósha, you shall take them to Moscow to-morrow, that's just one day; and then you shall come back here. When it's time for them to leave Moscow again, then we'll say good-bye finally for a month, and you can go back and escort them down to the interior."

"Capital. And you'll get the four extra days together," said the delighted Kátia, taking stock of Natásha's look of intelligence.

I cannot describe Aleósha's ecstasy at this new plan. He suddenly became quite comforted; his face shone with joy;

he embraced Natásha, kissed Kátia's hand, embraced me. Natásha watched him with a wistful smile, but Kátia could bear it no longer; she gave me a look with her sparkling eyes, kissed Natásha, and rose to go. At this very moment the French lady-companion sent a man to beg us to finish the interview, and to remind us that the half-hour was up.

Natásha rose. The two girls stood opposite one another, holding hands, and apparently trying to express with their eyes all the thoughts which were surging up in their hearts.

"We shall never see each other again, Natásha," said Kátia.

"No, never again," said Natásha.

"Then—good-bye!" They kissed once more.

"Do not curse me for this," Kátia whispered, "and I—give you my word—he shall be happy. Come, Aleósha, take me down," she cried hastily, seizing his arm.

"Vánia," said Natásha to me, when they had gone out—she was dreadfully agitated and worn—"Vánia, go after them now, dear, and don't come back at present. Aleósha is to be with me till eight o'clock; he has to go then; but come here at *nine* to-night, will you? I shall be all alone then."

So at nine o'clock I returned to Natásha's lodging from that scene of the broken cup with Nelly, whom I left under Alexandra Semeónovna's care, found Natásha alone, and waiting impatiently for me. Mavra brought in the tea-urn, and Natásha gave me a cup of tea, then settled herself on the sofa and made me come closer to her.

"Well, it's all over," she said, gazing intently at me. Ah, me! I shall never forget that look. "There's an end of our love. Half a year of life," she went on, squeezing my hand; "and now it's all over for ever." Her hand was burning hot; I begged her to go to bed at once. "Directly, directly, dear old friend; let me talk a little first, and recall a little of what has passed; I feel so overwhelmed. To-morrow, at ten o'clock, I shall see him for the last time—*for the last time!*"

"Natásha, you are in a high fever; you are shaking with ague; *do* take care of yourself."

"Why, Vánia, I have been waiting this half-hour to talk to you. I *must* talk a little. What do you suppose I have been thinking of all this time; what do you fancy I have been saying to myself? I have been saying, '*Did* I love him, or did I not? What was this love of ours; did it ever really

exist?' Do you think it funny that I should ask myself this question now?"

"Oh, Natásha, don't excite yourself like this. Do try to be calm, dear."

"You see, Vánia, I was forced to the conclusion that I never did love him as an equal, as women generally do love men; I loved him like—well, almost as a mother would. It seems to me that people never can really love each other quite as equals; what do you think?"

I looked at her anxiously; it seemed uncommonly like delirium coming on. She seemed to be impelled to speak, as though something forced her; but her words were very often quite disconnected, and some were even indistinctly pronounced. I was very anxious about her.

"He was my own," she continued. "Almost from the first moment I saw him I felt an indescribable longing to have him for my own; he must be *mine*, I felt; I wanted him to see no one, to look at no one, know no one but me—only me. Kátia spoke truly just now. I loved him, and felt all along a kind of pity for him. I longed, when he was away from me, that he might be perfectly and eternally happy. I could never look at his face without agitation; you know his expression, Vánia; such another expression of face as his does not exist in the world! And when he laughed I used to be cold all over; I was really. They used to say—you said it yourself not long ago—that he had not much character, and that his intellect was nothing much to boast of—that he was childish; well, I loved all that in him more than anything else; doubt it if you like, but I did. I don't know though—I loved him, all of him so much, as he was; perhaps, if he had been different in character, or cleverer or anything, I might not have loved him so. I'll just confess something to you, Vánia. You remember our quarrel, about three months ago, about that girl—what was her name, Minnie? I found out that he had been flirting with her; it pained me dreadfully, but at the same time I felt a kind of pleasure in the knowledge that he, my Aleósha, had been doing as grown up men did, visiting about among pretty women, and making the beautiful Minnie's acquaintance just as all the grown men did. I—oh, I had the greatest joy out of that quarrel; and then the forgiving him afterwards. Oh, my darling!"

She looked me straight in the face and gave a strange laugh,

and then set to work to think again, as though recalling something further.

She sat a long while so, with a pitiful smile on her lips, thinking of the past.

"I did so love *forgiving* him, Vánia," she continued. "Do you know, sometimes, when he left me all alone, I used to walk up and down and think and cry, and sometimes it struck me; why, the more he is to blame—the better. There'll be the more to forgive. He always seemed so like a little boy to me; I would sit here and he would lay his head on my knee and fall asleep; and I used to stroke his hair softly and caress his face. I always think of him just like that when he isn't with me. Vánia, what a sweet creature that Kátia is?" she said suddenly.

It seemed to me that the poor girl was probing her wounds on purpose, because she felt, as it were, the consolation of suffering, the need of creating pain and bearing it. It is often the way with a heart which has lost very much.

"Kátia can make him happy, I think," she continued. "She has character, and speaks to him so seriously and nicely. She talks all about wise things like a grown-up woman. And she is a regular child herself, she is, the dear little thing. Oh may they be happy! oh may they! may they!"

And the tears and sobs came welling from her heart at last. For fully half an hour she was absolutely unable to come to herself, or even to calm herself in the slightest degree. Dear, dear Natásha! even on this dreadful evening, in the midst of all her own griefs, she was able to take an interest in my troubles. When I found her a little calmer—or, more correctly, tired out—I thought to distract her by telling her about Nelly.

We parted very late. I waited in the house until she fell asleep, and when I went away, I begged Mavra to sit up with her poor mistress, and not leave her alone all night.

"Oh, for the end of all these troubles," I cried, as I walked home. "Oh for the end! let it be anything, anyhow, so that it be the end, and that soon."

Next morning at nine I was at Natásha's again; Aleósha arrived at the same moment, to say good-bye. I will not describe. I do not like to recall that scene! Natásha had apparently made up her mind to be firm and collected, and to seem in good spirits—but she could not manage it. She embraced



Aleósha suddenly, and pressed him close to her. She said very little, but she looked and looked and looked at him with hungry wild eyes. She listened greedily to every word he spoke, but I don't think she heard what he said. I remember he begged her to forgive him, to forgive him this new love of his, and everything he had done to offend her all this time, and his departure now. He spoke disconnectedly and with tears streaming from his eyes. Every now and then he took to comforting her—assured her that he was only going away for a month, at most five weeks—that he would come back in early summer, and they would be married, and the prince would consent; and most of all, he was coming back from Moscow to-morrow, and that they would have four whole days together, so that they were really only parting now for one day.

Strange, strange boy, Aleósha! He was convinced in his own mind that he was speaking the simple truth, and that he would unquestionably return from Moscow next day. Why was he so miserable himself; what made him weep like this? At last the clock struck eleven. I had the greatest difficulty in persuading Aleósha to go. The Moscow train left at twelve. There was just an hour left. Natásha told me afterwards that she never knew herself how she had her last look at him. I remember she made the sign of the cross over him, kissed him, and then, covering her face with her hands, rushed away into her own room. I had to conduct Aleósha to the very steps of the carriage, otherwise he would most decidedly have come back and would never have got away at all.

"All my hopes are centred in you," he said to me, as we went down stairs. "Vánia, my friend, I am guilty before you, and can never deserve your love, but be a brother to me to the end. Love her, Vánia! Never desert her. Write and tell me every particular and *all* about her. Write small, so as to get more in. The day after to-morrow I shall be here again for certain. But when I have gone away quite, then begin to write, will you?" I put him into his cab.

"The day after to-morrow," he shouted, as he drove off, "without fail."

With heavy heart I went back to Natásha. She was standing in the middle of the room with hands crossed over her breast, and she looked at me in perplexity, as though she did not know me. Her hair was rumpled, her eyes dim and confused. Mavra stood at the door looking at her anxiously.

"Oh, it's you!" she cried suddenly, with flashing eyes. You are the only one left here now, and you always hated him! You never could forgive him for being loved by me! And now you've come here again—to *console* me and soothe me, I suppose, and to persuade me to go back to my father, who has cast me off and cursed me. I knew it long ago, two months ago! I won't! I won't! I curse them myself! I curse them all! Go away. I can't look at you; go away, go away!"

I saw that she was delirious, and that the sight of me roused her to madness just now. I understood that so it must be, that it was but natural, and that I had better go. So I went and sat on the stairs, on the top step, and waited. Occasionally I went back and looked in, and talked to Mavra, who cried the whole time.

So passed an hour and a half. I cannot describe what I went through during that period. Suddenly the door opened, and Natásha rushed out in hat and cloak. She was perfectly beside herself, and told me afterwards that she remembered nothing of it, nor why she came out, nor where she intended to go to. I had no time to get out of the way to hide myself, when she saw me, and stopped suddenly before me as if struck motionless.

"I suddenly remembered" (she told me afterwards) "that I, in my cruel madness, had actually driven you away. You, my friend, my brother, my preserver! And when I saw you, poor dear faithful fellow, sitting there on my staircase, waiting, and waiting, till I should call you back, in spite of all my unkindness—my God, Vánia! I can't tell you what I felt! Something seemed to stab me to the heart!"

"Vánia, Vánia!" she cried, stretching out both hands to me. "You here!" and she fell into my arms. I carried her into the room; she was insensible. "What am I to do now?" I thought. "She is going to have a fever, that's quite clear."

I determined to run for the doctor. My old friend was always at home at this hour. I took a drosbky, and drove off for him. This malady must be taken at the outset. I begged Mavra, before I went, not to leave her mistress for a single second. Heaven helped me. I met the old doctor just coming out of his house. I beckoned him up beside me, and we dashed off back again.

Yes, Heaven helped me indeed! During the half hour that I was absent something happened to Natásha which might well

have killed her, had I not come back just in time with the doctor.

I had not been a quarter of an hour gone, when in came the prince. He had seen his friends off, and had gone straight to Natásha's lodging from the station. He had probably long ago planned and thought out this visit. Natásha told me afterwards that for the first moment her brain was so muddled that she was not even surprised to see the prince. He sat down opposite to her, and looked at her tenderly and compassionately.

"My dear girl," he said, "I understand your grief. I knew what a dreadful moment this would be for you, and made a point of calling upon you as a solemn duty. Be consoled, if you can, by the reflection that in thus giving up Aleósha you secure his happiness. But you understand this better than I do, for you yourself decided upon taking this noble, disinterested step."

"I sat and listened," Natásha told me afterwards; "but at first I did not understand a word of what he said. I only remember that I stared and stared at him and never removed my eyes from his face. He took my hand and began to caress it with his own; he seemed to like doing it. I was so little mistress of myself at the moment that I did not even think of tearing my hand away."

"You well realised," the prince continued, "that if you had become Aleósha's wife, you might be leading up to events which would result in his hating you; but your noble pride prevailed; you saw this and took your resolve; I did not however come here to praise you. I came to assure you that you will never find, neither here nor anywhere else, a better friend than myself. I feel for you, I pity you. I have taken an unwilling part in all this matter; but I have only done my duty. Your noble heart will recognise this fact, and will be at peace with my own. I have felt this more than you have, believe me."

"Enough, prince!" said Natásha. "Please leave me in peace."

"Certainly I will; I will go very soon," he replied; "but I love you as a daughter, and you must let me come and see you often; look upon me now as your father, and allow me to be of use to you."

"I do not require anything; leave me, please," said Natásha, again.

"I know you are proud; but I am speaking in all sincerity and from my full heart. What do you intend to do now? Shall you make peace with your parents? That would be a very good move; but your father is so unjust, so proud, such a despotic old man; forgive me for saying so, but such is, unfortunately, the case. In your parents' house, you would but meet with reproaches and new worries. The chief thing is that you should be quite independent; it is my sacred duty now to look after you and help you. Aleósha entreated me not to lose sight of you and to act as a friend by you. But besides myself, there are others no less devoted to you. You will allow me, I'm sure, to introduce Count N—— to you? He is a man of most noble sentiments, a relation of ours and, I may say, the benefactor of our whole family. He did much for Aleósha, and Aleósha both esteemed and loved him. He is a very weighty man, a person of great influence; he is old, and you—a young lady—can quite well receive him. He can set you up and, if you wish, find you a magnificent place with one of his relations. I long ago told him all and everything about that little business of ours, and his interest in you was so roused (he has a noble heart), that he is always begging me to introduce him to you as soon as possible. He is a man who sympathises with everything good and lovely, believe me, a most generous old man, and one who can appreciate worth when he finds it. Not long ago he was enabled to prove the generosity of his nature to your own father in a certain little affair."

Natásha raised her head quickly, as though someone had dealt her a blow. She understood what he was about now.

"Leave me, leave me *at once!*" she cried.

"My dear girl, you forget. This good count may be of the greatest service to your father, too."

"My father will take nothing at your hands. *Will* you leave me?" cried Natásha, again.

"Good heavens! how impatient and incredulous you are. How have I deserved this?" said the prince, rather disconcerted and looking anxiously around the room. "At all events," he continued, "you will allow me to leave with you this proof of my sympathy and especially the sympathy of Count N——, by whose advice I am now acting. This packet contains ten thousand roubles" (he pulled a large parcel out of his pocket); "wait a moment my dear," he went

on to say on seeing that Natásha had risen, furious, from her seat ; “hear me out, please. You know your father lost the lawsuit which we have been contesting, and these ten thousand roubles are to serve as indemnification for——”

“Away !” cried Natásha. “Go away, you and your money. I see through you ; scoundrel—scoundrel—scoundrel !”

The prince rose from his chair, white with malicious rage. Probably he had come to-day to feel his way, to see how the land lay, and, doubtless, depended much upon the effect of these ten thousand roubles upon the poor deserted girl. The scoundrel had acted as Count N——’s agent many a time in similar circumstances ; but he hated Natásha, and seeing now that his present enterprise would fail he changed his tone at once, and with mischievous delight determined to insult the girl, and so get *some* good out of his visit at all events.

“Oh, it isn’t at all nice of you to get so angry,” he said, his voice trembling slightly with impatient satisfaction to see the effect produced by his words ; “not at *all* nice. I offer you protection, and you perk your little nose in the air. You do not seem to be aware that you ought to be very grateful to me. I could have had you popped into a House of Correction long ago, as the father of a young lad whom you had enticed away from his home and robbed ; and I never did it ; ha, ha, ha !”

But we had now just arrived. Hearing the voices as we came through the kitchen, I stopped the doctor for one moment while I listened to the prince’s last sentence ; then followed his loathsome laugh and Natásha’s despairing cry, and I opened the door and rushed at the prince. I spat straight in his face, and hit him, as hard as I could let out, on the side of the neck.

He seemed as though he would show fight, but, seeing there were two of us he thought better of it and started to run, snatching up his bundle of bank-notes from the table as he went by. (He actually did that, for I saw it with my own eyes). I rushed out after him, and threw a rolling-pin, which I had caught up from the kitchen table, after him. Coming back into the room, I found the doctor supporting Natásha, who was struggling convulsively in his arms, just as though in a fit. It was a long while before we could quiet her, but at last we got her to lie down on her bed ; she seemed to be in a high state of delirium.

“Doctor, what is the matter with her ?” I cried in an agony of fear.

"We must wait and see," he said; "meanwhile, I don't like the look of it. It may end in fever; at all events, I shall take precautions."

An idea had just struck me. I persuaded the old doctor to stay with Natásha two or three hours, made him promise not to leave her for a moment. He gave me his word, and I ran off homewards.

Nelly was sitting in the corner of the room, morose-looking as usual, and she glanced strangely at me as I came in; I think I must have looked strange, too. I took her in my arms and sat down on the sofa, seating her on my knee; I kissed her; she flushed up at once.

"Nelly, my darling," I said, "do you wish to save us all? Will you be our good angel?" She looked at me in perplexity.

"Nelly," I repeated, "all my hope is in you. There is a father—you have seen him and know whom I mean—who has cursed his daughter, and came to ask you, yesterday, to come and be his child in her place. Well, that other man has just left Natásha now (and you said you loved Natásha); that man whom she loved so much, and for whose sake she left her father and ran away. He is the son of the prince who came here one evening—you remember—and found you here alone; when you ran out of the house to get away from him and were ill afterwards—you know whom I mean; he is a very wicked man."

"I know," said Nelly, trembling and getting very pale.

"Yes," I continued, "he is a very wicked man. He hated Natásha, because his son, Aleósha, wanted to marry her. Aleósha went away to-day; and, within an hour, the prince came to Natásha and insulted her, and laughed at her and frightened her; do you follow me, Nelly?"

Her black eyes were sparkling, but she dropped them when I looked up.

"Yes," she whispered, scarcely audibly.

"Natásha is now very ill and all alone. I have just left her under the care of our old doctor, and ran away here to you. Listen, Nelly; let's go to Natásha's father, you do not like him, I know; you would not go to live with him; but let's go there together, now, and when we arrive I will say that you have agreed to be his daughter instead of Natásha. Her father is very ill just now, and broken down, because he cursed Natásha the other day, and besides, the prince has been insulting him

dreadfully. He doesn't want to hear Natásha's name, even, at present ; but he loves her, Nelly, oh, so much ; and he longs to make it all up with her, I know it, I am certain of it. Are you following me, Nelly?"

"Yes," she said, in the same faint whisper.

I had spoken to her with tears in my eyes ; she looked timidly at me.

"Do you believe what I say?" I asked her.

"Yes, I do!" she replied.

"Very good, then I'll take you with me and set you down there, and they'll receive you with delight, and begin to ask you questions, and caress you. Then I'll lead the conversation so that they will question you about your old life, about your dear mother and your grandfather. Tell them all, Nelly, just as you told me. Tell them everything ; everything and conceal nothing at all. Tell them how that wicked man deserted your poor mother, and how she died in the cellar at Bubnoff's house ; how you and your mother used to go about the street and beg ; what she said, and what she asked you to do when dying ; and tell them about your grandfather ; how he would not forgive your mother, and how she sent you from her death-bed to get him to come and forgive her ; and how he refused to come, and she died. Tell them all—all. And when you narrate your story the old man will feel it, and apply it in his own heart. He knows that Aleósha left his daughter to-day, and that she is left all alone, helpless and friendless, and without means, at the mercy of the enemy. He knows all this, so, Nelly, will you? Save Natásha! Will you come?"

"Yes," she said, drawing her breath heavily, and looking fixedly at me with a long strange gaze. There was something reproachful in this look of hers, and I felt it in my heart. But there was no time to lose ; I took Nelly's hand, and we went out. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, and hot and misty ; it had been very hot and close of late, and there was a distant sound of early summer thunder. The wind was whirling the dust about the streets. We took our seats in a droshky. Nelly was silent, and only occasionally glanced at me, always with the same strange look in her eyes. Her breast was heaving, and as I held my arm round her to keep her from falling from the droshky, I felt her little heart beating as though it were trying to burst its way out.

## CHAPTER VII.

THE road seemed interminable : but at last we arrived. I went into the presence of the old couple with beating heart. I did not know how I should come out from them again, but I knew that I *must* come forth with pardon and peace in my hands.

It was four o'clock, and the old people were sitting alone as usual. Ikménief was ill and disturbed and was half lying on his comfortable armchair, pale and weak, and with a handkerchief wrapped round his head. His wife sat by him and occasionally wetted his temples with vinegar, continually and almost continuously watching his old face, which seemed to disturb and even annoy him. He was obstinately silent, and she did not dare speak. Our unexpected arrival rather dumbfounded both of them. The old lady was startled to see me with Nelly, and for the first few moments she seemed to look at us with a guilty air.

“Here is my Nelly. I have brought her to you !” I said as I came in. “She has thought it over and wants to come of her own accord, now. Take her and love her.”

Ikménief looked suspiciously at me ; and at the first glance it was clear that he knew all about Natásha having been deserted, left alone, and perhaps subjected to insult. He longed to penetrate the mystery of our coming, and looked questioningly at us one after the other. Nelly trembled, and pressed my hand tightly in her own ; she kept her eyes on the floor, and only occasionally threw a frightened look around—like some little captured wild animal. But the old lady very soon recollected herself, and fell upon Nelly, kissing her, caressing her curls, even crying over her and setting her down on a chair beside her own, with the child's hand fast in hers. Nelly cast curious side-looks at her, evidently surprised at this warm reception. However, having done all the caressing and kissing, and having got the child comfortably seated by her, the good old lady did not know what to do next, and looked naïvely at me for help. The old man knit his brows—I think he had pretty well guessed what we had come for ; but, seeing that I had observed his



displeased look and frowning brow, he put his hand to his head and said,

"I've got such a headache, Vánia!"

So we sat on, without any talking; and I wondered how to begin. The room was getting dark; a black thunder-cloud was passing over us, and again the distant rumbling was heard.

"How early the thunder has begun this year," said the old man. "But I remember in '37 it began still earlier down at our place."

Anna Andréevna sighed. "Shall we have the tea-urn, dear?" she asked timidly. But no one answered, and she took to caressing Nelly again. "What is your name, darling?" she asked her.

Nelly told her, in a scarcely audible voice, and became shyer than ever; the old man kept staring fixedly at her.

"Helen, did you say?" asked Ikménief again.

"Yes," replied Nelly; and again there was a minute's silence.

"My sister had a little girl of that name," said Ikménief. "and they called her Nelly, too, I remember."

"Haven't you any relations, little one? No father, or mother?" asked Anna Andréevna.

"No," whispered Nelly; "no one!"

"So I had heard—so I had heard. And did your mother die long ago?"

"No, not long ago."

"Dear little woman—little orphan girlie," said the kind old lady, looking at her with pity. Ikménief drummed on the table impatiently.

"Your mother was a foreigner, was she not? Didn't you say so, Vánia?" The old lady's timid questions thus went on. Nelly glanced at me quickly with her big black eyes, as though imploring help; her breathing was very irregular and laboured.

"Her mother was the daughter of an Englishman and a Russian woman," I began, "so that she counted for a Russian. Nelly was born abroad."

"What, her mother went abroad with her husband, after they were married?" Nelly suddenly flushed up. Old Mrs. Ikménief saw at once that she had made a false step. She trembled under Ikménief's angry look. He glanced severely at her, and then turned towards the window.

"Her mother was the victim of a bad and deceitful man," he said addressing the old lady. "She left her father to go to him, and took with her, her father's money for his benefit. The wretch wrung the money out of her, and carried her away abroad, robbed her, and threw her over. There was one good fellow who befriended her, and stood by her till the day of his death. When he died, two years ago, she came back to her father. Isn't that what you told me, Vánia?" he asked abruptly.

At this moment Nelly rose from her chair in the extremest agitation and made for the door. "Come here, Nelly;" said the old man, holding out his hand to her; "sit down here, near me, so; there, sit down, dear."

He bent and kissed her forehead, and commenced to smooth her hair gently with his hand. Nelly trembled all over but contained herself. Mrs. Ikménief looked on with delight; she was full of joy and hope to see the old gentleman begin caressing the little orphan at last.

"I know, Nelly, that a wicked, bad man ruined your poor mother, and I know also that she loved and esteemed her old father," said the old man, brokenly, continuing to caress the child's curls; he could not resist making that last defiant remark for our benefit. A light blush crept over his pale cheeks, but he tried hard not to look at us.

"Mother loved her father a great deal more than grandfather loved her," said Nelly, timidly but firmly; she, too, tried to avoid looking at anyone.

"How do you know that?" said the old man, impatiently, like a child, and looking, after he had said it, as though he were ashamed of his impatience.

"I know," said Nelly abruptly. "He would not receive mother—he drove her away."

I saw that Ikménief wanted to say something, to refute Nelly's statement, or to reply, for instance, that the old man had good reason for refusing to see his daughter; but he looked at us and was silent.

"How then! Where did you live when your grandfather would not take you in?" asked Anna Andréevna, who now developed great obstinacy of a sudden, and seemed determined to keep the conversation to this subject.

"When we first came," said Nelly, "we looked about for a long while to find grandfather, but we could never find him.

Mother told me that grandfather used to be very rich, and built a factory ; but that now he was very poor, because the man who went away with mother took all grandfather's money with him, and did not give mother any of it. She told me this herself. She told me, also," continued Nelly, who was gradually warming up, and seemed to wish to refute Ikménief's supercilious exclamations, but addressed all her remarks to the old lady, "she told me that grandfather was very angry with her, that she was very much to blame in his eyes, and that she had no one else in all the world, now, to befriend her, excepting grandfather. And when she told me this she used to cry, 'He won't forgive me!' She said when we were still on our way here, 'he won't forgive me, but perhaps he may see you, and love you, and forgive me for your sake.'

"Mother loved me very much, and whenever she talked like this she would cry, and kiss me over and over again, but she was dreadfully afraid of going to grandfather. She taught me to pray for grandfather, and prayed for him herself ; and she taught me a great many things, and told me all about how she used to live with grandfather, and how he used to love her more than all the world ! She said she used to play the piano to him, and read books to him in the evenings, and that the old man would kiss her and give her things—he gave her everything she wanted. The day they quarrelled was mother's birthday, because grandfather thought she did not know what present he was going to give her, and she *did* know. She wanted earrings, and he pretended that he was going to give her a brooch ; but he *did* give her earrings after all, and he was very angry when mother said she knew he would all the while, so angry that he didn't speak to her for half a day ; but afterwards he came of his own accord and asked pardon and kissed her."

Nelly said all this with animation, and her poor pale cheeks had a pretty blush on them during the narrative. It was evident that her dear mother had often told the child of her former happy life at home, as she sat there in the corner of the wretched cellar hugging her dear little one, the only thing left to her in all the world, and crying over her, little suspecting at the time what a vivid impression her story made upon the sensitive, precocious heart of the little ailing girl.

But Nelly's attractive theme suddenly came to an end ; she recollected herself, looked distrustfully around, and was silent.

The old man frowned and drummed on the table again. His wife's eyes were full of tears and she quietly took this opportunity of wiping them.

"Mother arrived here very ill indeed," Nelly went on, very softly, "her chest was very bad; we searched a long time for grandfather and could not find him, and we had to hire a corner of a cellar to live in!"

"A corner—and she so ill?" cried Anna Andréevna.

"Yes, a corner," said Nelly; "mother was very poor. But mother often told me," she added with more animation, "that to be poor was no sin; but it was a sin to be rich and abuse one's wealth—God would punish that!"

"Was it here, at Vassili Ostrof, that you took a lodging—at Bubnoff's was it?" asked the old man with studied carelessness, and staring at me. He spoke evidently because he did not want to be conspicuous by his silence.

"No, not there; we lived in the Meschansky first," said Nelly. "It was dreadfully dark and damp there, and mother was very ill; but she could walk about still, at that time. I used to wash her linen for her, and she cried all day. There was an old woman living there, and a man too, who was always drunk and used to shout so dreadfully. I was frightened of him, and mother used to take hold of me and clasp me tight when the man swore and shouted, and I felt that she trembled herself. He tried to murder the old woman once—she was a very old woman and walked with a crutch. Mother was sorry for her and took her part, so the man struck mother, and then I struck the man." Nelly stopped, the recollection was too exciting for her, her eyes glared like fire.

"Good God!" cried Anna Andréevna, terribly interested, and never taking her eyes off Nelly, who had addressed the whole story to her exclusively.

"Then mother went out, and took me with her. We walked and walked about the streets all day until evening, and mother cried as she walked, and held my hand all the time. I was dreadfully tired, and we had eaten nothing all day. Mother kept talking to herself, and often said to me, 'Be poor, Nelly! and when I die don't listen to what anyone says; go to nobody, but be alone and poor, and work, if you can; if you have no work then beg about, but *don't go to him!*' At dusk we reached some large street, and we were just crossing it when mother suddenly called out, 'Azorka, Azorka!' and

a large dog bounded quickly up to mother, and whined at her, and jumped on her. Mother was dreadfully frightened, and became so pale, and she gave a cry, and then fell on her knees before a tall old man, who was coming slowly along with a stick, and with his eyes fixed on the ground. And this tall old man was grandfather; he looked so thin, and was poorly dressed. That was the first time I had ever seen grandfather. Grandfather was deadfully startled also, and got quite white, and when he saw mother lying at his feet and clinging to him he tore his feet away, and pushed mother, then he struck his stick on the pavement and walked away from us very quickly. Azorka remained behind, and licked mother, and was so happy to see her, and then he ran after grandfather, and pulled at his coat to make him come back, but grandfather struck him with his stick. Azorka wanted to come back to us, but grandfather called him, and he went off with grandfather, whining all the while. Mother lay there as if she was dead, and a crowd collected, and the police wanted to carry us away. I was crying the whole time, and trying to hold mother up. At last she got up, looked all round, and came away with me. I took her home. The crowd stared at us, and shook their heads.

Nelly had to stop to take breath so as to nerve herself. She was very pale, but looked determined. She had evidently resolved to tell everything. She seemed to be inspired almost at this moment.

"Well," remarked Ikménief, "I suppose your mother had offended him so grievously that he was justified in rejecting her." He spoke in a quavering voice, and his whole tone and manner was full of nervous irritability.

"Mother told me," Nelly continued, "that she had offended him. She said as we went home, 'That is your grandfather, Nelly; I offended him, and he cursed me, and God is now punishing me for it!' She kept on saying this all the evening, and all next day, and for several days, and she spoke as though she did not know what she was saying."

The old man was silent now.

"And how did you come to change into the other lodging?" asked Anna Andréévna, who had continued to cry quietly all through Nelly's narrative.

"Mother became very ill that night," Nelly said, "and the old woman who lived with us went and found a lodging at

Bubnoff's for us, so we moved over there. Mother took to her bed entirely, and stayed there three weeks very ill. I looked after her; all our money was spent, and the old woman helped us, so did Ivan Alexandrovitch, the coffin-maker. When mother got up again, and could walk about she told me all about Azorka."

Nelly paused. Old Ikménief seemed much relieved that the conversation had passed to Azorka.

"What did your mother tell you about Azorka?" he asked, bending lower so as to hide his face still more, and gazing steadily at the floor.

"She told me all about her old life and about Azorka; that some boys were taking the dog to the river by a string to drown it, but mother paid them some money, and had the dog brought home. Grandfather laughed at it very much at first, but mother loved Azorka very dearly. He ran away very soon, and mother was so unhappy that grandfather grew frightened, and offered a hundred roubles reward to whomever brought Azorka back. Next day he came back, and the hundred roubles were paid. After that grandfather loved Azorka very much too. He had belonged to some street performers, and used to drag a little cart with a monkey coachman in front, and he could do all sorts of tricks. Mother was very fond of him, and he used to sleep in her room. But when she left grandfather, Azorka remained behind, so that when mother saw Azorka in the street she knew that grandfather must be also near."

The old man asked no more questions; he didn't like the tendency of Azorka's story.

"Then didn't you see your grandfather any more?" asked Anna Andréevna

"Yes; when mother was well again I met him in the street one day. I had been to buy some bread, when suddenly I saw a man with Azorka, and I recognised my grandfather. I kept away and pressed myself against the wall. Grandfather looked at me, and stared long at me; he looked so terrible that I was dreadfully frightened, and then he went on. Azorka knew me, and jumped about and licked my hands. I ran away homewards, but when I looked back grandfather had gone into the shop. I began to think, and I felt sure that he was gone in there to ask questions about me; this frightened me very much, and I resolved to tell mother nothing about it

for fear of making her ill again. I did not go to the shop next day. I said I had a headache, and when I did go out on the day after, I ran all the way and saw no one. A day or two after that I was going along, when I suddenly turned a corner and there were Azorka and grandfather just before me. I took to my heels and ran down another street, and went to the shop from the other side; but I came plump upon them again, and I was so startled that I could not move from the spot. Grandfather stood before me, and stared at me again for a long while; then he stroked my hair and took my hand and led me away, Azorka following and wagging his tail. Then I noticed for the first time that the old man could not walk straight, and had to lean on his stick, and that his hand shook very much. He brought me up to a stall where a man sold biscuits and apples at the corner of the street. Grandfather bought me a gingerbread cock and a little fish and a bonbon and an apple, and when he took out an old leather purse to pay for them his hand shook so that he dropped a five copeck piece, which I picked up for him. He gave me the five copecks and the gingerbread and things, but he never said a word; then he stroked my head again, and hastened away and left me standing there.

“Then I went home and told mother all about it, and how I had been afraid at first and hid myself. Mother would not believe me at first, but afterwards she was so glad and happy, and she kissed me and asked me questions all that evening. When I had told her everything she said I was never to be afraid of grandfather again, and that he must love me very much if he came to look for me like that. She told me that I must be affectionate to grandfather and talk to him. Next morning she sent me out several times, though I told her that grandfather only came about here in the evening. She came out with me and watched from a distance, hiding behind corners and so on; next day she did the same, but grandfather did not come. Both these days it rained very hard, and mother caught a bad cold so that she took to her bed once more.

“Grandfather came past again the next week, and again he bought me gingerbread and an apple; but he did not say a word. When he went away I quietly followed him, for I had determined to find out where he lived and to tell mother. I followed some distance off, and on the other side of the road,

so that my grandfather should not see me. He lived a long way off (not in the house where he died afterwards), in the Gorohovaya, in a large stone house, his lodging was high up on the fourth story. I found all this out and came home very late. Mother was very much frightened because she did not know where I was. When I told mother that I had found out where he lived she was very happy, and wanted to go and see him the very next morning. But when next morning came she was afraid, and for three days she did not dare go. Then she called me and said, 'Look here, Nelly, I am ill now and can't think of going; but here is a letter which I have written to grandfather, go and give it to him. And watch him, Nelly, to see how he reads it, and what he says and what he does. And go on your knees to him and beg him to forgive your mother.'

"Mother cried very much and kissed me over and over again, and crossed herself and me before I went, and prayed to God, and made me kneel with her before the ikon; and though she was so ill she went out with me as far as the gate, and as long as I could see she was still standing there and watching me on my way. I came to my grandfather's and pushed open the door—it had no bolt.

"Grandfather was sitting at a table eating bread and potato, and Azorka sat by wagging his tail and watching grandfather eat. The room had low small windows and was very dark, and there was only a chair and a table in it. He lived alone. I went in, and he was so startled that he became quite white and trembled all over. I was frightened too and didn't say anything, but I went up to the table and put the letter down. When grandfather saw the letter he was furious and jumped up and seized his stick, threatening me with it, but he did not hit me; he took me and led me to the threshold and pushed me out. I had not time to go two steps down before he opened the door again and threw the letter after me, unopened. I came home and told mother everything, and she took to her bed again at once!"



## CHAPTER VIII.

AT this moment there was a loud clap of thunder, and heavy drops of rain rattled against the window ; it had grown very dark. The old lady, Mrs. Ikménief, was startled, and crossed herself ; we were all silent for a moment.

"It will be over directly," said Ikménief ; and he rose and walked up and down the room. Nelly watched him from the corners of her eyes ; she was in a state of the most painful agitation. I noticed this, but she seemed to avoid my glance.

"Well, what happened next?" asked Ikménief at last, sitting down again. Nelly glanced nervously around.

"Then you did not see your grandfather any more?"

"Oh, yes, I did," said Nelly.

"Tell us all about it, dear, do!" cried Anna Andréévna.

"I did not see him again for three weeks," Nelly began, "until winter set in. The snow had come and it was cold. When I met grandfather again in the same place I was very glad, because mother fretted so that he didn't come. When I caught sight of him I ran to the other side of the road on purpose that he might see I ran away from him. As soon as I looked again, I saw grandfather running after me and trying to catch me up, and Azorka trotting after him ; I was sorry for him, and stopped. Grandfather came up to me and took my hand and led me away ; but when he saw that I was crying, he stopped, and bent down and kissed me. Then he caught sight of my old shoes, and asked me whether I had not any better ones. I told him, as quickly as I could, that we had no money at all, and that our landlady kept us and helped us out of pure pity. Grandfather said nothing, but he took me off to a shop and bought me a new pair of shoes and made me put them on at once. Then he took me away to his room in the Gorohovaya, calling at a shop on the way and buying a tartlet and two sweets.

"When we got to his lodging he told me to eat the tart, and watched me eating it ; then he gave me the sweets. Azorka came and put his paw on the table asking me for a

bit of my tart, which I gave him, and grandfather laughed. Then grandfather took me and placed me near him, and began to stroke my head and asked me whether I had ever been taught anything? I told him, and he asked me to come whenever I could at three o'clock in the afternoon, and he would teach me himself. Then he told me to turn to the window and not look at him until he said I might, and I turned away, but I peeped back at him quietly and saw him take four roubles out of the corner of his pillow, inside. When he had got the money out he brought it to me and said :

“‘That is for you alone.’ I was just going to take the money, but on thinking it over I said, ‘If it’s for me alone I won’t have it.’ Grandfather got very cross, but he said, ‘Well, take it how you like and go,’ so I went out, and he did not kiss me this time.

“When I came home I told mother all about it. Mother was getting worse and worse. There was a medical student who knew the coffin-maker, and he treated mother and made her take some medicine.

“I often went to grandfather’s, mother told me to. Grandfather bought a New Testament and a geography, and began to teach me out of them. He told me what countries there were in the world and what people lived in them, and about the seas; and what had happened to the world before our time, and how Christ had forgiven us all our sins. He was very glad when I asked him questions of myself; so I asked him a great many and he told me all sorts of things, and a great deal about God. Sometimes I had no lesson, but played with Azorka. Azorka had got to love me very much. I taught him to jump over a stick, and that made grandfather laugh and stroke my hair. He very seldom laughed. Some days he talked a good deal, and at others he did not say a word, but sat quite still, as though asleep, only with his eyes open; and so he used to remain till dusk, and then he looked so strange and so old. At other times, I would come and find him sitting quite still, and Azorka lying at his feet, and he didn’t hear when I spoke to him. I would wait and wait, and cough, but grandfather took no notice, and so I just had to go away; and I always found mother lying waiting for me, to hear what I had to say; and so the night passed—she lying and listening, and I telling her over and over again about grandfather. And when I began about Azorka, and how I had made grandfather laugh, she was

so pleased, and made me tell it all over again, and then she laughed too, and afterwards began to pray.

"I often wondered why mother loved grandfather so much and he didn't love her at all. So when I next went to grandfather's I told him, on purpose, how much mother loved him. He listened, and listened, looking so cross, and said nothing whatever. So I asked him why it was that mother loved him so and was always asking about him, and that he never asked me anything about her? Grandfather got so angry at this, that he drove me out of the room. I stood outside awhile and then he came out and called me in again; but he was very cross and did not speak to me.

"Then, when we began to read the Bible I asked him again, why did Jesus Christ say 'Love one another and forgive each other's sins,' and yet he did not wish to forgive mother? Then he jumped up and shouted that mother had put me up to saying that; and he pushed me out once more and told me never to dare to come near him again! I said I wouldn't come back any more even if he wanted me to ever so much, and so I went away. Next day grandfather changed his lodging."

"I said the rain would soon be over, Vania—and so it is. Look, there's the sun shining," said old Ikménief, suddenly going to the window.

Anna Andréevna looked at the old man in astonished surprise, and indignation shone in her eyes, generally so mild and frightened. She quietly took Nelly on her knee.

"Go on, darling, and tell me all—I will listen. Let those whose hearts are cruel and unkind——" She did not finish but burst into tears.

Nelly looked at me in perplexity, rather frightened. The old man glanced at me, shrugged his shoulders, and turned away again.

"Go on, Nelly," I said, and she began again.

"I did not go to grandfather's for three days after that, and during that time mother grew very bad; our money had all gone, and we had nothing to get medicine with, and we had nothing to eat either, for the coffin-maker and his wife were also out of money and began to reproach us for living at their cost. Then on the third day I got up and began to dress myself. Mother asked me where I was going, and I said to grandfather's to ask him for some money. She was very glad, for I had told her all about how he had driven me away, and

how I had said that I would not go back to him. She had cried over it and tried to persuade me to go.

"I went to look for grandfather's new lodgings, and as soon as I came in he rushed up to me and began stamping his feet at me, but I told him at once that mother was very bad and that we had no money for medicine; fifty copecks were wanted I said, and that we had nothing to eat either. Grandfather shouted at me, and pushed me out of the room and shut me out, locking the door. But while he was pushing me out I told him that I would sit on the stairs and refuse to go away until he gave me the money. So I sat down on the stairs. A little while after, he opened the door and saw me sitting there, so he shut it again. Then a long time passed, and at last he opened the door again, saw me and banged it to once more; after that he opened the door and looked out many times.

"At last he and Azorka came out; he shut the door behind him and passed me without a word. I didn't say a word either, and so I sat on until it was dark."

Nelly's lips were quivering, but she made a great effort and nerved herself again.

"He came back," she continued, "when it was quite dark, and brushed up against me as he went by. 'Who's that?' he cried. I said it was I. He must have thought I had gone away long ago, for when he saw that I was still there he was very much surprised, and stood a long while in front of me. At length he struck his stick on the stone steps and ran into the room, whence he brought me some copper money and threw it down on the stairs. 'There,' he said, 'take that! it's all I've got; and tell your mother that I curse her!' and with this he banged the door and disappeared. I began to collect the coppers in the dark; but grandfather must have thought that I should not be able to find them for he brought out a candle and by its light I soon collected them all. Grandfather helped me to look for the money and told me there ought to be seventy copecks; then he went back. When I reached home I told mother all about it and gave her the money, and the tale made mother worse than ever. I was quite ill myself that night, and was in high fever in the morning; but I could only think of one thing for I was very angry with grandfather. So when mother was asleep I went towards grandfather's house, but I stopped on the bridge before I got

there. Very soon a man passed; I saw him afterwards—he was a bad man—at Bubnoff's, the night that I came away from there with Ivan Petrovitch. This was the first time I had seen him. I stopped him and asked him for some money—a rouble I said. He looked at me and repeated: 'A rouble?' I said 'Yes.' Then he laughed, and said 'Come along with me then.' I did not know whether to go or not, when up came an old man in gold spectacles; he heard me ask for a rouble, and he stooped down and asked me why I wanted that amount particularly. I told him mother was ill and that she required a rouble for medicine. He asked where we lived, and wrote the address down and gave me a rouble. That other man, when he saw the old gentleman in spectacles, walked away and did not ask me any more to go with him. I went to a shop and changed the rouble into coppers; thirty copecks I kept apart for mother, and had the seventy copecks in my hand as I went to grandfather's. As soon as I got to his door I opened it, stood at the threshold, raised my hand and threw the money into the room with all my might, so that the coppers rolled about all over the floor. 'There, take your money!' I said, 'mother does not require it from you, because you cursed her.' I banged the door and ran away."

Nelly's eyes sparkled and she looked defiantly at old Ikménief.

"You did quite right," said Anna Andréevna, not looking at her husband, and pressing Nelly close to her. "You were quite right to throw his money back in his face. Your grandfather was a wicked, cruel-hearted old man." Ikménief gave a grunt. "Well, well—what next?" said Anna Andréevna impatiently.

"I didn't go to grandfather's any more, and he didn't come to see me," said Nelly.

"What, and so you remained, you and your mother? Oh, you poor things, poor things!" cried the old lady.

"Mother grew worse and worse, and very seldom got up at all now," continued Nelly, and her voice trembled with emotion. "We had no money whatever, and I had to go out begging. I went with the old woman who had lived with us at the last lodging; we went from house to house, and sometimes begged of passers-by; and so we lived. The old woman told me she was not a beggar, but that she had a paper of recommendation, which she carried about; she showed me this paper—people gave her money when they

read it. I went with her, and we collected all we could, and lived on what we got. Mother knew I did it because the people about reproached us for begging, and Bubnoff came and said to mother that she had better let me come to her rather than beg. Bubnoff had been to mother before, and brought her some money, and when mother would not accept it she called her a proud woman, and sent over some food instead. So, when Bubnoff said that I had better come to her instead of begging, mother grew frightened, and cried, and Bubnoff began to scold her (she was tipsy), and said I was a regular little beggar, and that I begged all over the town with the old woman; that evening the old woman was turned out of her room in Bubnoff's house.

"When mother heard this she cried very much; then she got up suddenly, dressed, took my hand, and led me out with her. Ivan Alexandrovitch tried to stop her, but she wouldn't listen, and went out. Mother could hardly walk a step, and she sat down continually in the street, while I supported her. Mother kept on saying that we were going to grandfather's, and that I must lead her there, but it was night now. At length we came to a very large street, and there in front of a certain house there were a lot of carriages drawn up, and a great many people were coming out, and all the windows were lighted up, and I heard music inside. Mother stopped and seized my hand, and said:

"Nelly, be poor! Be poor all your life; don't go *there*, whoever tries to make you go, or whatever they tell you. You might go there, and be rich, and wear fine clothes; but I don't wish you to. They are wicked and cruel. My wish, my command to you is this: remain poor, beg alms; but if anyone comes and asks you to go with them, say, 'No, I don't want to.'

"Mother told me this while she was very ill, and I want to obey her all my life," added Nelly, trembling with agitation, and with a burning face; "and all my life I shall serve and work. I have come here to serve you and work. I won't be here as your daughter."

"Oh, nonsense—nonsense, darling! Nonsense!" cried the old lady, clasping Nelly tightly. "Why, your mother was so ill when she said this, that she——"

"She was mad," said Ikménieff, cuttingly.

"Well, then she was mad, and what of that?" cried Nelly,

turning sharply on him. "If she *was* mad she told me what to do, and I shall do it all my life. She swooned when she said this, and they wanted to take us off to the police, but a gentleman came up and asked me where we lived; he gave me ten roubles, and told me to take mother home in his own carriage. After this mother never got up from her bed again, and three weeks later she died."

"And your grandfather; did he never forgive her?" asked Anna Andréevna.

"No, he did not forgive her," said Nelly, nerving herself with the greatest difficulty. "A week before her death, mother called me, and said, 'Nelly, go to grandfather again, for the last time, and ask him to come here, and give me his forgiveness. Tell him that I am going to die in a few days, and that I must leave you all alone in the world. And tell him too, that it's dreadful for me to die like this.'

"I went to grandfather's and knocked at his door. He opened it, but when he saw me there, he wanted to shut it in my face; but I seized it with both hands and shouted out 'Mother is dying, and she wants you; come with me!' But he pushed me away, and banged the door to. I crept back to poor mother, and lay down beside her. I hugged her, but said nothing. Mother hugged me back, and did not ask me any questions——"

Here old Ikménief struck the table hard with his hand, and rose up. He looked round at us all with a strange dumb expression, and then, as though too weak to do anything else, sank back into his chair. Anna Andréevna did not look at him; she caressed Nelly and groaned bitterly.

"On the day before she died," Nelly went on, "mother called me up to her, took my hand in hers and said, 'I must die to-day, Nelly,'——she wanted to say more but could not. I looked at her, but she did not seem to see me any more, and only held my hand and pressed it tight. I softly disengaged my hand and ran out of the house; I ran all the way till I got to grandfather's. As soon as he saw me he jumped up from his seat and looked at me, and was so dreadfully frightened that he grew quite pale and trembled all over. I caught hold of his hand and only said: 'She is just dying.'

"Then he immediately began bustling about in a dazed way; he seized his stick and rushed out of the room, forgetting his hat in spite of the cold. I took his hat and put it on his head and we ran out together. I hurried him along and told him

to hire a droshky because mother was just on the point of dying, but seven copecks was all the money that grandfather had. He stopped a number of droshkys and tried to make them take us over for seven copecks, but they only laughed at him and at Azorka, and Azorka and we ran on and on.

Grandfather hurried along and got very tired and out of breath. Suddenly he fell down and his hat came off. I helped him up and put his hat on again and began leading him by the hand, but we didn't reach home until it was very nearly night, and poor mother lay there dead.

"When grandfather saw her lying dead before him, he wrung his hands and trembled all over, and stood by the body; but he did not say a word. Then I went up to my poor dead mother and took grandfather by the hand and shouted out to him:—

"There, cruel, wicked man! Look, look!" and grandfather gave a cry and fell down on the floor like a dead man."

Nelly jumped up and disengaged herself from Anna Andréevna; she stood in the midst of us pale, agitated, and frightened.

But Anna Andréevna caught her up again, and cried as though with a sort of inspiration:

"I, I will be your mother, now, Nelly, and you shall be my child. Yes, Nelly, we'll go away and live together, away from all these cruel, wicked people. God will recompense them. Come Nelly, we'll go away together; come!"

I never, either before or after, saw the old lady in such a state of mind, nor had I believed that she could ever be so fearfully excited. Ikménief straightened himself in his chair, stood up and asked in broken accents—

"Where are you going to, Anna?"

"To her, to my daughter. To Natásha!" she cried, and dragged Nelly away with her towards the door.

"Wait! Wait a minute."

"No, I won't wait! Cruel, wicked man! I have waited long enough, and she has waited long enough, and now, good-bye!"

With these words the old lady wrapped herself in her cloak, glanced at her husband; and paused, he was standing before her, hat in hand, and with feeble shaking hands was trying to put his great coat on.

"You too? Are you—are you coming—really?" she cried,



folding her hands entreatingly, and looking at him distrustfully, as though not daring to believe such happiness possible.

"Natásha! Where is my Natásha? Where is she? Where is my daughter?" The words seemed to tear themselves out of his very heart. "Give me back my daughter! Where—where is she?" and seizing his staff, which I handed him, he rushed to the door.

"He has pardoned her! He has forgiven her!" cried Anna Andréevna.

But the old man did not reach the threshold. The door opened violently and Natásha rushed in, pale, with eyes flashing, as though under the spell of delirium. Her dress was dishevelled and soaked with the rain. The handkerchief with which she had tied up her head hung down from her neck, and on the tangled locks of her hair glistened large drops of rain. She rushed in, saw her father, and fell on her knees before him, holding out both hands to him.

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## CHAPTER IX.

**B**UT he had her in his arms already. He took her up, lifting her like a little child, carried her to a chair—put her down in it, and himself went down on his knees before her. He kissed her hands and feet; he gazed at her, and kissed her with feverish haste, just as though he could not as yet believe that she was really with him once more, that he really saw her and heard her once again—his own little daughter—his Natásha.

Anna Andréevna, sobbing, caught hold of her hands and pressed her old head against Natásha's breast, and so lay in her daughter's embrace. She had no strength to speak.

"My darling! My life—my joy!" cried Ikménief disconnectedly, taking Natásha's hands, and looking into her face like a lover—looking into her pale, thin, lovely face, and into her glorious eyes, in which the tears glistened and sparkled.

"My joy—my child!" he repeated, and again gazed at her with a sort of venerating, love-abounding intoxication of delight.

"Why did they tell me she had grown so thin and old?" he cried, looking smilingly round at us, and still on his knees before her! "She is pale and thin, certainly, but look—look how lovely she is. She is prettier than she ever was before, the darling. She really is prettier," he added. The poor old fellow had to stop speaking, for his soul was bursting with joy.

"Oh, father, stand up; do stand up," cried Natásha, "I want to kiss you too, you know."

"Oh, my darling, my darling! Did you hear how prettily she said that, Anna?" and he took her in his arms again.

"No, no, Natásha! It is for me to lie at your feet until my heart hears you say that you forgive me, for I know well that I can never deserve your pardon. I rejected you, Natásha, and cursed you. Do you hear, Natasha? I cursed you. Could you believe it of me, could you? Cruel little heart, why didn't you come to me? You knew how I would receive you. Oh, Natásha, you must remember how I used to love you. Well, all this time I have loved you twice—a thousand times as much as before. I would tear my heart out for you, or lay it at your feet, my joy—my darling!"

"Well, kiss me—kiss me properly, you cruel old man, on my lips and face, as mother does," cried Natásha faintly, but with a voice which was full of the tears of joy.

"Yes, darling, and your eyes too, there! You remember how I used to kiss you in the old days?" said the happy old man, after a long hug with his daughter.

"Oh, Natásha, did you ever dream of us? I used to dream of you day and night; you used to come to me every night, and I used to cry over you, and once you came as a little wee child, like you were at ten years old, when you had just begun to learn the piano; you came in a little short frock and pretty shoes; and little pink arms—she used to have pink arms at that time, you remember, Anna? You came and sat on my knee and kissed me. And you—oh, you bad little girl—you thought I should curse you, and refuse to receive you if you came. Why, listen Natásha, I often went to your house no one knew, not even mother, and I used to stand beneath your windows and wait; sometimes I waited half an hour at a time, hoping to see you come out, and get a look at you from afar off. And of an evening you had a candle lighted sometimes, and I used to come and gaze at your candle, and long to see

if it were only your shadow, darling, so that I might bless you for the night. Did you ever bless me at night? Did you ever think of me? Did your heart ever tell you I was near? And often in the winter, I used to come up your stairs and stand out on the threshold of your door, in the hopes of hearing your dear voice inside. Did you laugh at me? or curse me? Why, I was at your house to-day; I went to forgive you, and only turned back when I reached your very door. Oh, Natásha, my darling!"

He rose and took her from the chair into his arms, in a long, tight embrace.

"She is back on my breast again at last!" he cried. Oh, I thank Thee, God, for all, for all—for Thy anger, and for Thy mercy! and for the sunshine which is lighting our hearts once more after the storms! Oh, let us be humiliated, let us be insulted; let our insulters and the proud destroyers of our peace triumph over us! Let them throw their stones at us! We won't be afraid, Natásha. We'll go hand in hand, and I will tell them all: "This is my precious beloved daughter, whom you have insulted and humiliated; but I love her, I love her! and I bless her with my blessing for ever, and ever, and ever!"

"Vánia!" cried Natásha faintly, holding out her hand to me from the midst of her father's embrace.

Oh! never can I forget that at this supreme moment she thought of me, and called me to her.

"Where's Nelly?" asked the old man, looking around.

"Yes, where is she?" cried his wife. "My darling! Nelly! how could we have neglected her so?"

She was not in the room; she had crept into the bed-room unobserved. We all went in there. Nelly was in the corner of the room, hiding timidly from us.

"Nelly, what is the matter, my child?" cried the old man, going up to her to embrace her. She stared at him fixedly for a long time.

"Mother! mother!" she said at last, as though wandering.

"Where is my mother?" she cried again, and stretched out her little trembling hands towards us. Then suddenly a strange terrible cry fell on our ears, convulsions seized her limbs and features, and she fell to the ground in a dreadful fit.

## EPILOGUE.

### I

IT was the middle of June, a hot stifling day ; it was impossible to stay in town—dust, scaffoldings, and other nuisances, and the closeness of the air were unbearable. But, there ! thank goodness ! there's the thunder ! The clouds frowned overhead, a squall came, and blew the volumes of thin dust about the streets. A few heavy drops fell on the pavement, and a moment after whole torrents of rain were deluging the town.

In half an hour the sun was shining again, and I put my head out of my window to inhale the fresh air into my stifled lungs. I longed to throw down my pen and my work, and even defy my publisher, and run over to see my friends at the Vassili Ostrof. But I *must* finish my work, the publisher insists upon it, he won't pay me if I don't. *They* are waiting for me too. However, the evening will be free, and this evening will atone for the last two days and nights, during which I have tried to write, and have written exactly three pages in all. Well, then, it's finished at last ; my back aches, and so does my head ; my nerves are all wrong, and my doctor's words ring in my ears.

“No, no ! No health can stand such a strain !”

But my heart was full of joy—for the novel was finished—*quite* finished ; and though I owed the publisher a lot of money already, yet he would surely give me something—say fifty roubles ! and it was long since I had had such a sum of money in hand. I took my MS. and my hat, and hastened off to see him.

The publisher was in a good humour. He had just made a good speculation. He was delighted to hear that the novel was finished, and was pleased to compliment me on having *really finished* something. He went to his iron box, and got me the promised fifty roubles, and gave me a review of my last book to read. It was not a bad nor a good review, but I was quite pleased. The critics said, among other things, that my novels “left an after-taste.” Also, that I worked, and planned, and

changed and elaborated them to such an extent that it became tiresome!

The publisher and I roared over this, because I had told him that I wrote my last novel in two days and nights—the whole of it. The publisher is just off for a drive, and offers to take me as far as Vassili Ostrof in his new carriage. On the way he gives me a long lecture on literary matters, all retailed from remarks which other persons have made to him, and very little of it do I listen to, and at Vassili Ostrof he puts me down, and drives off.

Here is the Thirteenth Line, and here is the house. Anna Andréevna sees me coming and beckons with her hand, telegraphing me at the same time to be as quiet as possible.

"Nelly has only just fallen asleep, poor child," she whispers hastily, "take care you don't wake her. She's so weak, poor darling. We are very anxious; and aren't you ashamed of yourself, Vánia? You've not been here for two days."

"I told you I should not be able to come," I whispered; "I had some work to finish."

"At all events you said you would come to dinner to-day. We got Nelly out of bed on purpose, and on to a comfortable chair and brought her to the table."

"I want to wait for Vánia with you," she said; and Vánia never turned up. Oh, you bad boy, you upset her so that I didn't know how to quiet her! However, she has gone to sleep now, the dear little girlie. My husband is in town (he'll be back to tea), about a place which he thinks he can get—in Perm, I believe. When I think of having to go there it breaks my heart."

"Where is Natásha?"

"In the garden, dear, in the garden. Go to her, do. She always seems so—I don't know what it is quite; but oh, Vánia, it bothers me so! She says she's quite happy and contented; but I don't believe her. Go to her, Vánia, and then come and tell me on the sly what you think the matter is."

But I am not listening to Anna Andréevna's words. I am off to the garden, a little garden attached to the house, twenty-five paces each way, and all a mass of green. There are three tall old trees in it, a few young birches, several bushes of lilac and other shrubs; and it has a couple of narrow paths running across and dividing it into four parts. The old man

is delighted with this garden, and expects to find mushrooms in it later on. The chief thing is, Nelly loves the little garden, they often bring her into it in an armchair. Nelly is the idol of the household now.

But here is Natásha. She meets me joyfully and stretches out her hand to me. How thin she looks, how pale! She too has just recovered from a bad illness.

"Have you quite finished it, Vánia?"

"Quite, quite; and I'm free for the whole evening."

"That's right. But don't you spoil your book, writing so quickly?"

"What's to be done? However, I don't think I have spoiled it; I always rise to the emergency when I have a press of work, and my nerves get into that exalted state that I can express myself better, more keenly and clearly when I write fast. So it's all right."

"Oh, Vánia, Vánia!"

I may remark that Natásha had become very jealous of my literary success and renown of late. She has read every word I have written during the last twelvemonth, and asks questions and reads all the notices on my work, and, in fact, is very anxious to see me rise in the literary profession. She is so kindly interested in this matter that I am quite surprised.

"You'll write yourself out, you know, Vánia," she said, "and your health will suffer. Why, C—— only writes one novel in two years, and N—— has only written one in *ten* years. That's why their work is so beautifully finished, you won't find a single instance of carelessness there."

"Oh yes; but they are independent and don't have to write against time; while I am simply a post-horse. But all this is nonsense, let's talk about something else. Anything new?"

"Much. Firstly, a letter from *him*."

"What, another?"

"Yes, another. She handed me a letter from Aleósha. This was the third since the separation. He had written the first from Moscow; he wrote in great agitation to say that circumstances had arisen which prevented his return to Petersburg as arranged. In the second letter he had said that he was coming back in a few days to marry Natásha, that this was a thing decided, that no earthly power should prevent it; but from the tone of the letter it was quite clear that he was

in despair, that outside influences had undermined his resolutions and had quite overmastered him, and that he did not believe what he said. He remarked that Kátia was his providence, and that she alone supported and consoled him.

I opened the present letter, the third, with avidity. It was written on two sheets, hastily, badly, and in a very scrawling hand. It began by telling her that Aleósha renounced her, and advised Natásha to forget him. He exerted himself to prove that their union was impossible, that outer influences were too strong for it to take place, and that it was best so, because he and Natásha were not well matched and could never be happy together.

But this strain did not continue, and he went on, forgetting all his former arguments and deductions, and without tearing off the other half of the sheet, to declare that he was a miserable wretch, that he could not resist his father who had just come down to the village, that he could not express the torment of his mind. He went on to say that he felt sure he could make Natásha happy, that they were made for each other, and beautifully matched in all respects; he rejected and spurned his father's arguments, and drew the loveliest picture of life-long happiness which awaited Natásha and himself if they could only be married. He then again cursed his own feeble-mindedness, and said farewell for ever. The letter was evidently written by the boy while quite beside himself. I confess my eyes filled with tears over it.

Then Natásha handed me a letter from Kátia. Kátia wrote briefly, that Aleósha was pining a good deal, that he sometimes appeared in a state of despair, cried very often, and even seemed quite ill at times; but that *she* was there, and that he would soon be perfectly happy. Kátia did her best to assure Natásha that Aleósha's despair was quite real, and wrote that Natásha must not suppose that Aleósha was unfeeling, or likely to be consoled very soon for her loss.

"He will never forget you," she added, "and never could, for he has not such a heart as that. If he *did* forget you, or ceased to grieve for you, I should cease to love him at once." So wrote Kátia.

I handed Natásha back both letters. We looked at one another, but neither said a word. It was always so now; we never talked of the past, as though by mutual consent. She suffered intolerably, I could see that. She had had three weeks of high fever after her return here, and had only just become con-

valescent. We did not even talk of the change coming upon us so soon, though she knew that her father was to have an appointment in the interior, and that we were to part. In spite of this, she was so sweet and tender to me, and took so loving an interest in all my affairs at this time, that at first I could not help thinking that she wanted to atone to me for the past. But I soon thought better of it, and understood that her motive was quite different, that she simply loved me very dearly, that she could never be happy without me, and could never be indifferent to my affairs. I think no sister ever loved a brother as she loved me. I knew very well that our threatened parting weighed on her heart, and that she was aware that I could never live without her; but we never talked about it, although we conversed about the future at times, too.

I asked after Ikménief.

"He will be back soon," Natásha said; "his appointment is certain now; he need not have gone out to-day, it would have done as well to-morrow, but——"

"What?"

"Well, I got this letter. Father is so madly devoted to me now, Vánia, that I don't know what to do with him. I'm sure he always dreams of me, and when he is awake he thinks of nothing but 'How am *I* feeling now? What am *I* thinking of just now?' and so on. I can see very well how he sometimes puts on the air of not being in the least bit concerned about me; how he laughs, and tries to make us laugh. Mother is not taken in by him the least, and sighs when he acts so—dear old awkward thing! To-day, when my letter came, he said he had to go out, and rushed away so as not to meet my eyes. Oh, Vánia! I love him more than anyone in all the world; even more than *you*, Vánia!" She pressed my hand tightly. We walked twice round the garden before she spoke again.

"Maslobóeff was here to-day, and yesterday as well," she said. "And do you know what he comes for, so often? Mother has the greatest faith in him, and believes that he has all the laws at his finger-ends, and can arrange anything he likes; well, what do you think she is brewing in her old head? She is dreadfully sorry now that I do not become a princess, the thought gives her no peace, and she has told Maslobóeff so, I believe. She daren't speak to father about it, but she thinks Maslobóeff might help her, somehow, with the laws.



So he comes and drinks wine here ! ” added Natásha, laughing, “ I am sure it is as I say, because of mother’s dark hints ! ”

“ And how is Nelly ? ” I asked.

“ Well, Vánia ! I am surprised that you haven’t asked that question before ! ” said Natásha reproachfully. Nelly was the idol of the entire household. Natásha loved her exceedingly, and the child had given Natásha all her heart, too. Poor dear little thing.

She had never thought to find so much kindness and joy in this world ; and her wounded little heart was opening rapidly now to us all. Even here, Nelly had long remained obstinate and withheld the tears of peace ; but now she had quite thrown herself into our arms. She loved Natásha best of the household, and the old man next. As for myself, I was so absolutely, *essentially* necessary to her, that if I did not come near her for a while, her illness would become much worse. I should have to explain my two days’ absence now. Nelly still disliked showing her feelings too plainly and openly. She was the cause of great anxiety to the whole of us. It had been decided, silently, and without consultations, that Nelly was to live on at the Ikméniefs’ ; but their departure was approaching and Nelly grew worse and worse. She had fallen ill on the very day that I brought her to the Ikméniefs’, when Natásha came home and the reconciliation was effected. Her malady had crept upon her slowly but surely before then ; and now it was developing with alarming rapidity. I cannot describe her illness accurately ; her fits increased in frequency, certainly, but the chief mischief seemed to be a sudden collapse of vital power and continuous fever, which had brought her to such a condition during the last days that she could not leave her bed for a moment.

And strangely enough, as Nelly grew worse so did she become more affectionate and sweet, and open with us all. Three days ago she had caught my hand as I passed her bed, and had pulled me down towards her little hot face, then suddenly put both arms tight round my neck—her thin wasted little arms—and kissed me passionately ; afterwards, she however asked me to send Natásha to her, she wanted Natásha to come and sit on her bed.

“ I want to look at you, ” she said to her, “ I dream of you very often, I think of you and see you every night. ” She evidently wanted to tell Natásha something ; but did not quite know

what to say or how to say it. She used to love old Ikménief almost the best of all, excepting myself. I may add that he loved her too, almost as much as his own Natásha. He had a most wonderful knack of amusing and cheering Nelly. No sooner did he come in than they began their laughing and jokes. The little sick child used to play and laugh and tell him her dreams and other stories, coquet with him, laugh at him, and the old man was so thoroughly happy and delighted to sit and look at "his little *daughter* Nelly," that he became fonder and fonder and fonder of her.

"God gave her to us as a consolation for all our suffering, Vánia," he said one day as he came out of her room, after saying good-night and making the sign of the cross over her, as usual.

We all of us used to collect of an evening, including Maslobóeff and the old doctor, who had become much attached to the house, and we would bring Nelly out on to the balcony in an armchair. The sweet spring scents came up from the garden and Nelly used to sit and listen to our conversation. Sometimes she spoke herself, but when she did we sat in fear and trembling, for her recollections were all of topics which might not be touched upon. We could not but be reminded of our guilt, as it were, before her, on that day when we brought her in to tell her story.

The doctor, too, was very much against these recollections of Nelly's, and changed the subject at every opportunity. On such occasions, Nelly always saw which way the cat jumped, and would do her best to conceal the fact that she understood by laughing and joking with Ikménief or the old doctor. Meanwhile, she became worse and worse; her heart beat very irregularly, and the doctor told me that she might leave us now, very soon. I didn't tell the Ikméniefs this, not wishing to disturb their peace; the old man was so sure that his Nelly would be quite well by the time they all had to start.

"Here's father come home!" said Natásha to me, hearing his voice. "Come along, Vánia!"

Old Ikménief came in talking loudly as usual, but his wife hushed him with a sigh, and he began to tell us in a whisper all about his application for the new appointment and his success. He was in very good spirits about it.

"We shall be off in a couple of weeks," he added, looking rather timidly at Natásha, to see how she would take the

news ; but Natásha only smiled, and his doubts vanished at once.

"Yes, we shall be off, my friends, and I'm glad of it. I'm only sorry to part with you, Vánia." I may mention that he did not ask me to accompany him, as he would certainly have done under other circumstances—that is, if he had not known of my deep love for Natásha. "But what's to be done, my boy?" he went on to say, "it's painful to us all. But a change of place and air will do us all good ; change of place means change of *everything*, you know." He glanced at Natásha again.

"But how about Nelly?" asked Anna Andréévna.

"Nelly? Why, the darling child is a little ill just now, but she'll soon be well enough to go. She's better already ; don't you think so, Vánia?" He turned to me anxiously, as though he felt that I could relieve his anxiety somehow or other.

"How is she to-day?" he continued. "Did she sleep? Is she awake now? You know what, wife, we'll have the tea-urn brought into the garden and we'll fetch Nelly out on a couch. I'm going to see her ; I just want to look at her. Oh, don't be afraid, I won't wake her," he added, seeing that Anna Andréévna was growing fussy.

But Nelly was awake, and in a quarter of an hour we were all sitting in the garden, Maslobóeff and the doctor and the rest of us. I have said that the whole party liked Maslobóeff, especially the old lady ; but there was never a word said about Alexandra Semeónovna, for, Mrs. Ikménief having made the discovery that Alexandra had not, as yet, gone through the ceremony of legal marriage, it was thought better to say nothing about her, and not to receive her into the house. If Natásha had not been with her, and if all we knew of had not happened, I dare say she would not have been quite so particular.

Nelly seemed very sad and preoccupied this evening, and as though she had had a bad dream. Maslobóeff had brought her a large bunch of lilac, and she was very much pleased at this, and gazed long and affectionately at the flowers.

"So you are very fond of flowers, Nelly?" said the old man. "Wait a bit, then, to-morrow—but you shall see."

"Yes, I do love them," said Nelly, "and I remember how we greeted mother with flowers *there* (she meant abroad) one day. She had been ill for a month ; and Heinrich and I agreed that when she first came down from her room we would

decorate the whole house with flowers, and so we did. One day mother told us that she was coming down to dinner next morning ; so we got up early and Heinrich brought a lot of flowers, and we decorated the whole place with garlands and green leaves. There was ivy, and some broad leaves, I don't know what they are called, and some of the leaves that cling to everything, and big white flowers, and narcissus (my favourite), and rhododendrons, and all sorts of lovely flowers. We arranged them everywhere in garlands and vases, and had big plants about in pots, and mother was *so* pleased, and Heinrich was very happy. Oh ! I remember it all so well."

Nelly was particularly weak and nervous to day. The doctor watched her very anxiously ; but she insisted on talking. She went on till dusk telling us all sorts of details of her life *then* and we did not interrupt her. She and her mother and Heinrich travelled much from there, and had seen a great deal. Her memory seemed to be very exact, and the facts stood out most vividly before her to-night. She told me excitedly about the blue skies and high mountains covered with ice and snow, and the waterfalls and torrents which she had visited or passed, and of the lakes and valleys of Italy ; of the flowers and trees and swarthy people with black eyes, and of what she had said and done and seen among them. Then she told us of the large towns, and of a huge cathedral, whose cupola was illuminated with many coloured lamps, and of a hot southern town beneath blue skies and overhanging blue waters.

She had never spoken to us like this before, or told us these details of her former life ; we listened with strained attention, for, up to now, we had only heard the dark side—of the horrible, revengeful, pitiless city, with its dirt and its rare sunbeams, and its wicked, half-insane people, from whom she and her mother had borne so much. I could not help imagining poor Nelly and her mother lying on their miserable bed in the cellar, and recalling the lovely scenes and glorious atmosphere which they had known in the past days with Heinrich ; and I imagined Nelly's solitary, sad musings upon all these beautiful past scenes when her mother was dead, and while that dreadful Bubnoff was doing her best, with her savage cruelty and barbarities, to bend the child to her horrible will.

But at last Nelly was taken ill, she fainted in the midst of her narrative, and was carried indoors. The old man was dreadfully frightened, and blamed himself for allowing her to talk so much.

Nelly swooned several times consecutively, and when she came to herself she insisted on seeing me, she had something to tell me; so firm was she on the point that the doctor said she must have her will, and turned everybody else out of the room.

"Listen, Vánia!" she said, when we were alone. "They think that I am going away with them; but I will not go because—I cannot, and I—I—shall remain with you, meanwhile; and that's what I wanted to tell you."

I tried to talk her over; I said the Ikméniefs all loved her so much, and that she would be so much more comfortable with them; that she was a real daughter to them now; and that, though I loved her so much, it couldn't be helped, we must part.

"No, no!" she insisted. "I often see mother now, and she always cries, and says that I ought not to have left grandfather alone—that it was wrong of me. So I want to stay here and look after grandfather."

"But your grandfather is dead, Nelly," I cried, in great astonishment.

She thought for a while, looking fixedly in my face.

"Tell me again how he died, Vánia," she said; "tell me all and leave out nothing." I was amazed at all this, but I told her the story once more, in detail. I thought she must be delirious, or that her head had not quite recovered the effects of the swoon.

She listened in rapt attention, and I remember well how her black eyes shone as she gazed into my face during the narrative. It was dark in the room, now.

"No, Vánia," she cried, "he did not die. Mother told me only yesterday about him, and when I said, 'But he's dead, mother,' she cried and was so miserable about it, and said, 'No; that they told me he was dead just to deceive me, but that he was not dead, and still walked the streets begging; just as you and I walked about,' mother said; and 'always in the place where you and I first met him, when I fell down at his feet and Azorka recognised me.'"

"Oh, Nelly, it is only a dream; you dream like that because you are ill," I said.

"I thought so, too," Nelly said. "But to-day when I fell asleep, I saw grandfather himself; he was sitting in his room, and he told me that he and Azorka had eaten nothing for two

whole days, and he was very angry and scolded me; he said he had no snuff, and that he could not live without snuff. So I thought I went and stood on the bridge to beg money and buy him some bread, and potatoes, and snuff. And while I stood and begged, I saw him walk towards me and stand aloof, and after a time he came up and took what money I had got; 'That's for bread,' he said, 'and now you can get me some more for my snuff.' After awhile he came up again, and again took what I had. I told him I would have given him all I had without his taking it, but he was angry, and said he couldn't trust me, because Bubnoff had told him that I was a little thief. 'And where's the other five copecks?' he said, and he beat me—it hurt me so—there on the bridge, and I cried a good deal. So now I think he really is somewhere there, Vánia, waiting till I come."

I again began to try and talk her over, and at last I think I convinced her; but she said she was afraid of falling asleep for fear of seeing grandfather. At last she hugged me close to her.

"At all events, I can't leave *you*, Vánia," she said, putting her little cheek against mine. "Even if grandfather *is* dead, I can't part with you."

Everyone in the house was alarmed at Nelly's swoon. I told the doctor all about her hallucinations, and asked him to tell me outright what he thought of her condition.

"I can't tell for certain," he said; "but, meanwhile, she can't recover—she will die. I don't tell them this, because you asked me not to; but to-morrow I am going to call a consultation. It *may* be that other heads may devise something, but I don't think they will; and I am so sorry for her, she is such a very, very dear child."

Ikménief was much agitated. "Look here, Vánia, what I've thought of! Pleasurable excitement can't hurt her; we'll arrange the rooms with flowers for her to-morrow, as she and Heinrich did for her mother. There's a shop near here where you can get the loveliest flowers; I'll go at once; they are cheap—oh! absurdly cheap, but you must stay and make it all right with the wife about expense. And, look here! you've finished your book, you've got nothing to do—stop here to-night; your bed's all ready up there—you know the corner; and you and I and Nátasha can get the decorating done early in the morning, eh? She has better taste than we have, you know! Is it agreed?"

## II.

I CONSENTED to spend the night at the Ikménieffs'. Maslobóeff and the doctor went away ; the former was about to tell me something, but thought better of it, and put it off ; he had been very thoughtful lately. I said good-night to the old people, and went upstairs to bed, when to my surprise I saw Maslobóeff waiting for me in my room.

"I came back, Vánia, because I had better tell you now. Sit down ; it's such a stupid thing, and so annoying."

"Well, what is it—what is it ?" I cried.

"Why, your confounded prince again. I've been bothering over it for the last fortnight."

"But, what is it—what's the matter ?"

"There you are again : 'What's the matter !' You're just like Alexandra Semeónovna. I hate women ; a crow can't caw but they must yell, 'What's the matter ?'"

"Well, don't get cross about it," I said.

"I'm not cross ; but things must be done deliberately," he replied.

I gave him a few moments to settle down into a more cool and collected state of mind.

"You see," he began again, "I came here on a scent ; at least, there was no scent, but I had an idea, and deduced from certain circumstances that Nelly—well, in a word, that Nelly is the prince's legitimate daughter."

"What nonsense," I said.

"There you are ! 'What nonsense !'" he cried in great excitement ; "one can't talk to people like you. I tell you she is the prince's legitimate daughter."

"Very well," I said, "but don't shout so. I quite understand what a tremendously important revelation you have made," I added, considerably agitated. "Why, think of the consequences."

"Bother the consequences. Now, look here—it's a secret ! Remember that and be quiet. This is how the thing was : In the winter, before old Smith died, the prince was making inquiries—he began when he came back from Warsaw—at least, he began before, but that was not on this particular scent. The chief point is, that he had lost a thread. Thirteen years before, he had deserted Smith's daughter in Paris, but

he had kept his eye on her ever since, and knew of Heinrich's friendship, and of Nelly's existence, and of her mother's illness; in fact, he knew everything, but suddenly lost the thread. He got off the scent when Heinrich died, and the woman came back to Petersburg. He could easily have hunted her up here, of course, but his agents deceived him; they said she had gone to the South of Germany; they were deceived themselves, and had taken another woman for her. After a year or so the prince began to suspect that the other woman was not Smith's daughter, and it struck him that very likely the latter might be here in Petersburg, and he employed me—I was recommended to him—to hunt the thing up. He told me the whole story, of course in general terms, and with much concealment and cunning—you know the prince; but with all his duplicity and art he could not hide the main threads of the tale.

“I thought to myself ‘Has he told me what he really wants to discover? Isn't there some real object hidden behind the sham one which he puts forward?’ And it struck me that in that case I was being cheated; for if the thing he professed to wish to find out was worth a rouble for instance, the real object might be worth four roubles, when discovered. So I acted on my own idea and hunted about for scent, getting a whiff here and another there. You may ask why I did this; I reply, if only for the reason that the prince seemed a great deal too keen about it, and rather nervously so; that would be a fair enough reason, eh? He takes a girl from her father and seduces her, we'll suppose; and then he leaves her while she is expecting her confinement. Well, there's nothing very important in that, for him; it would only appear to him a mere agreeable little diversion—nothing more—and of no special importance whatever. And yet he was nervous about it; therefore I was suspicious.

“Then I came on a very curious scent. I chanced to meet a woman, a cousin of Heinrich's, who had loved him before, and had gone on loving him for fifteen years. She is living here now, a baker's daughter, a German. She had letters from Heinrich, and when he died they sent her some of his papers and documents. Of course the German fool didn't understand the important bits, she only appreciated the parts about the Moon, and ‘mein liebchen Augustine,’ and that sort of humbug; but I obtained some most necessary information from the papers,



and hit upon new scent altogether. I got to know all about Smith's capital, of his daughter's theft of that capital, and of the prince's getting the money into his own hands—and then, amid allegories and humbug of all sorts—well, nothing definite at all, Vánia—that fool Heinrich said nothing outright, but hinted, and out of his hints, and surrounding facts and circumstances, I began to hear heavenly music—nothing less than that the prince was married to Nelly's mother!

“When did he marry her? How, when? Abroad or here? Where were the documents? There was nothing certain about it. So I tore my hair, Vánia, and searched and worried day and night, day and night, and at last I came upon Smith. Then he must go and die, straight off! I didn't even have time to see him alive. Next I fall upon another scent.

“I hear of the death of a woman in Vassili Ostroff, under interesting circumstances; I make inquiries and drive off to Vassili Ostroff myself—and as you will remember I meet *you* there. In a word, I learned a great deal from Nelly—”

“Stop,” I said. “Surely you don't think that Nelly knows that she is the prince's daughter?”

“What absurd things you say—why you know she is, yourself. That's not the point, though. The chief thing is that she is the prince's *legitimate* daughter! Do you follow me?”

“Impossible,” I cried.

“That's what I said myself at first; but it is the whole point of the matter that this ‘impossible’ thing is, in all probability, the plain fact.”

“No no, Maslobóeff; you have got astray, somehow. Not only does Nelly not know that she is legitimate; but she is actually his illegitimate daughter. As if her mother, with the slightest proof of her marriage in hand, could ever have played the wretched part she did, and, besides, leave her daughter—her little orphan daughter—to such a miserable state of existence as we found her in? No no, quite impossible!”

“I thought so myself—that is—the questions you raise have been difficulties to me all along; but we must take the fact into consideration: that the woman was the most extravagantly foolish woman in the world. Think of the circumstances; it was romance—but in its wildest and maddest development. From the first she had fancied that she was about to enjoy a heaven upon earth; she loved madly—trusted unboundedly; and I haven't the slightest doubt that she went mad afterwards,

not because this man deserted her, but because she herself was deceived in *him*—in that he *could* cheat her and throw her over. That the angel could cast her into the mud, spit upon her, and humiliate her! Her romantic soul could not stand the shock. And then the mortification of it! In her sorrow—and chiefly in her *pride*—she turned from her deceiver with infinite contempt. She tore up all evidences of their union, all her documents; she spat upon the money—even forgetting that it was not hers but her father's, and refused it—preferring to be able to look back at him all her life as a robber, and to have the right to despise him as such, and probably she informed him that she would consider it a dishonour to call herself his wife. Was she likely to apply to him afterwards for help? Don't you remember that Nelly told us how she had said, on her very death-bed, 'Don't go to them—work, beg, anything, but don't go—whosoever should ask you,' thereby showing that she expected they would ask her; in fact she fed on revenge, instead of bread.

"I got a good deal out of Nelly, my boy, and still pump her occasionally. I know for a fact (through a woman at Bubnoff's) that Nelly's mother *did write to the prince*."

"What? she wrote? The letter reached him?" I cried, impatiently.

"Well—that's just the question; she certainly wrote and intended to send it—but she took back the first letter without sending it on; the fact is significant though; for if she wrote once, she very probably wrote again. But I don't *think* she did send another letter, for the prince only found out she was in Petersburg and whereabouts, for *certain*, at her death. How glad he must have been!"

"I remember Aleósha mentioning that he had got a letter which put him in excellent spirits; that was not long ago; but go on—what about you and the prince?"

"Well, think—full moral certainty and not a scrap of proof—not a scrap, for all my trouble. So my game has been to frighten him by pretending to know much more than I do."

"Well, and how has it all ended?"

"Nohow; I required facts, documents—and of these I had none! One thing he feels sure of, that I have it in my power to make a good scandal of the business—and *that* he does not want at all; for he is making important social connections, just at present. Did you hear that he is going to be married? Yes

he is! next year—he chose her last year—she was only fourteen then, now she is fifteen, in short frocks, I believe, poor little thing! Her parents are delighted. She is daughter of some general. Very rich. Naturally he was anxious to hear of his wife's death. But the thing I shall never forgive myself for, all my life, is that the scoundrel spat on me a fortnight ago. I saw that he knew now that I had no proofs, and I thought the thing had better not drag on, as it might only show my weakness, so one day before he left, I brought myself to accept two thousand roubles, as if that were the value of such a piece of work as I had done. Well, I stood before him and he said, 'Oh, Maslobóeff—I haven't paid you for all your trouble as yet. I'm going out of town, so here are two thousand roubles, and I hope our affair is quite finished now.'

"'Yes, *quite*, prince,' I said; but I did not dare look at his face, for I knew quite well that it was saying, as clearly as expression can say, 'It's too much, I know; but I give it you out of pure benevolence, because you are such a fool.' I don't remember how I got out of the room."

"But good heavens! Maslobóeff, that was too bad of you."

"Bad? It's criminal,—vile; there are no words to express it."

"But surely he ought to be made to provide for Nelly, at least?"

"Of course he ought, but how? I can't frighten him now, for I've taken his money. I estimated my power over him at two thousand roubles, and sold it back to him for that."

"But surely Nelly's rights mustn't be ruined for such a reason?" I cried in despair.

"No, no, they shall not be; I won't allow it!" cried Maslobóeff. I shall take it all up again, beginning with Nelly herself. What if I *did* take his two thousand roubles. I simply took that because he had cheated me before. No, no! I have reason to think that Nelly has the key to the whole mystery. She knows *all, all!* Vánia. Her mother told her everything. In her fever and anguish she had no one else to turn to, and she told Nelly everything. Maybe she even has papers. Now, Vánia, you shall help me in my searches because you have influence over Nelly."

"Certainly I will, certainly!" I cried. "You will do it for Nelly's sake, the poor child, not for mere gain, Maslobóeff?"

"Well, Vánia, that's not your affair. Of course, as a

humane man, I shall do it chiefly for Nelly's sake ; but I am a poor man, too, and that cursed prince shall not be allowed to do a poor man out of his lawful gains ; he has cheated me once and made a fool of me. I shall not be so green again, Vánia."

Our flower reception of Nelly did not come off next day, for she was much worse and could not leave her room. And never again did she leave that chamber alive. She died a fortnight after. During those last days she never quite recovered her faculties, or rid herself of those hallucinations of hers. She was convinced that her grandfather was calling her and was very angry with her for not coming, and shook his stick at her, and bade her come and beg for bread and snuff. Very often she cried in her sleep, and woke and told us she had seen her mother. Sometimes her mind seemed to clear, and if we were alone she used to take my hand in her little hot fingers.

"Vánia," she said, "when I am dead marry Natásha." That seemed to be her great idea. I would smile and say nothing, then she would smile too, and shake her fingers at me with a playful laugh, and then kiss me. Three days before her death—it was a lovely evening—she begged to have the window open and the blind pulled up. She looked long at the dense green outside and saw the golden setting sun, and suddenly asked to be left alone with me.

"Vánia," she said, very faintly, "I shall die soon—very soon, and I want to tell you so myself. I leave you this as a keepsake" (she showed me a small pouch which she carried on a ribbon tied round her neck together with her cross), "mother left me this when she died. When I am dead take it and read what you will find inside. I shall tell them all to-day that only you are to have this case. And when you have read it go and tell *him* that I am dead and that *I did not forgive him*. Tell him that I read the Bible and that I knew we were told there to 'forgive our enemies,' but that as mother, with her last breath, cursed him, so do I now curse him, both for mother and for myself. Tell him how mother died, how you saw me at Bubnoff's, tell him *all*, and say that I preferred to be at Bubnoff's rather than go to him."

So saying poor Nelly paled so dreadfully and her heart beat so violently that she fell back on her pillow, and for a couple of minutes she could not speak at all.

“Call them all, Vánia,” she said at last, faintly. “I want to say good-bye.—Good-bye, Vánia!” She held me close, close for the last time. All our party came in; the old man could not realise that she was dying, he could not harbour the thought. To the last moment he assured us that she would certainly recover. The last few nights he would not sleep a wink; but sat at the foot of Nelly’s bed only half alive from anxiety. He tried to anticipate every little wish of Nelly’s, and whenever he came out of the room he would burst into bitter tears, assuring us again next minute, however, that she would really recover.

He decorated her room with flowers, he bought the loveliest roses, red and white, and brought them to her; all this excited Nelly very much, she was so moved with his great love for her. On the night of her leave-taking, the old man would not believe he must really part with the child for ever. Nelly smiled and tried hard to be cheerful and playful, she even laughed and joked with him that evening; and we all left her room full of hope; but next morning she was beyond speaking; and in two days she was dead. I remember how the old man twined flowers about her coffin, and with what despair he gazed at her thin dead face, and her little hands crossed over her breast. Natásha, and all of us did our best to soothe him; but he wept and would not be comforted, and after her funeral, he was really ill.

Anna Andréevna took the letter-case and gave it to me. In it I found a letter from Nelly’s mother to the prince; I read it on the day of Nelly’s death. She cursed the prince, and said that she could never forgive him. She described their life and all its miseries, in the midst of which she was forced to leave Nelly, and begged him to do something for the latter, at least.

“She is your daughter, and you know it!” she wrote, “I have told her to give you this letter after my death. If you do not reject Nelly then, perhaps I may forgive you there, and on the day of judgment, I may pray the Judge at the mercy-seat to forgive you your sins! Nelly knows the contents of this letter. I have told her all! *all!*”

But Nelly had not carried out her mother’s instructions. She had known all, but did not go to the prince, and died without making peace with him. . . . .

When we came back from Nelly’s funeral, Natásha and I

went into the garden ; it was a hot, lovely day. They were all going away in a week. Natásha looked at me with a long, intent gaze.

“Vánia, Vánia !” she said, “surely it has all been a dream ?”

“What has been a dream ?” I asked.

“All, all ! she cried--all this last year's history. Vánia, why did I ruin your happiness ?”

And in her eyes I read : “We might have been so happy together !”

THE END.

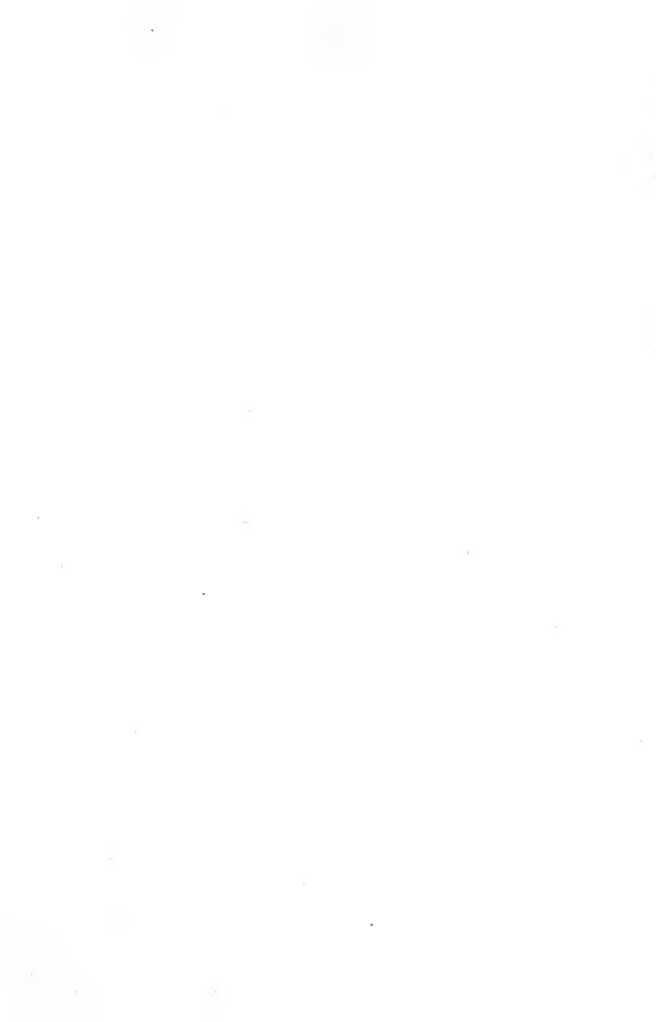












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